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MR. WARRENNE :

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CHAPTER XL.

LOVE AND ABUSE.

LADIES seldom make their appearance very early after a ball. In town the hours are all arranged to suit each other ; but in the country, where people insist on breakfasting at their usual time, it is inconvenient to sit up all night. Mr. Reynolds thought he did a great deal in adjourning breakfast to ten o'clock, at which hour precisely he came down, starched as usual, and greeted Mr. Courtenay, who was always an early riser.

"Mrs. Reynolds will not appear," he said, beginning grimly to make the tea ; "she is very much fatigued with her evening, and intends taking her breakfast in her room. As to Florence, I conclude that we shall see her every minute."

"No doubt," said Mr. Courtenay ; "unless she is tired also."

"I imagine there must be something fatiguing in dancing," said Mr. Reynolds, gravely buttering his dry toast.

Certainly he had never tried.

"I should not wonder," said Mr. Courtenay. "I only know it does not tire me."

"I have always deprecated these pleasures," said Mr. Reynolds ; "they are at once absurd and injurious. What benefit does a young woman derive from running about a room all night, and finding herself unfit to fulfil her duties in the morning ? It is now half-past ten."

"Very true !" said Mr. Courtenay.

Breakfast went on in silence—the gentlemen then looked over the papers—a few remarks passed on the subject of the railways. Soon a carriage was heard to drive to the door.

"I rather think that is my solicitor," said Mr. Reynolds rising from table; "I have some business of my own to transact before I come to yours."

Courtenay bowed, and Mr. Reynolds went to his study.

Soon after Florence came down, looking so much paler, so much older indeed, so terribly ill, that a common acquaintance would hardly have recognised her.

"Let me ring for some hot coffee," said Mr. Courtenay; "everything is cold here."

"So I suppose," said Florence languidly; "I know I'm late."

"Very natural!" said Courtenay, going up to the table; "what shall I do for you?"

"Oh! nothing at present; I'll only take some coffee," said Florence.

"What a horrid rainy day it seems. Where's Mrs. Reynolds?"

"She does not show—she is wiser than you, Miss Reynolds—she keeps close till she has recovered her fatigue."

"I look dreadful! don't I?" said Florence, coming languidly to the table. "Whose carriage was that I heard just now?"

"Mr. Young's," replied Courtenay.

Florence paused, with her hand on the back of the chair she was advancing to the table.

"Mr. Young arrived!" she faltered.

"Yes; didn't you tell me he was coming to-day?"

"But so soon," said Florence.

"A few hours sooner or later, what does it matter?" replied Courtenay.

"Very true!" replied Florence, taking her seat with a dejected air.

"Oh! as you are so soon to become relations, I may show you this note I received from Ada just before breakfast. She is engaged to be married to Sir Frederic Manning—they have been quick about it, for last night she was rather put out that Sir Frederic didn't——"

Florence was sitting like a waxen image; she seemed neither to see nor hear.

"Are you ill, Miss Reynolds?" he asked stopping short in his relation.

"No; give me the note," she whispered.

She took it. Ada wrote in the highest spirits.

"As I bored you so with my fancies last night," she said, "I can't do less than give you the earliest news of my engagement. Sir Frederic came this morning—actually before we had breakfasted—and papa, finding that my heart was set upon it, gave his consent at once. Sir Frederic promises to be very good in future; and as for his difficulties, why we can set them to rights. It is so easy, where only money is concerned. By the way, mamma made me laugh excessively at breakfast, by declaring that everybody fancied me engaged to Mr. Warrenne-Digby. The very nicest person in the world, whom I

like extremely ; but you know, Charles, how very far my thoughts have been from him, though he does waltz to perfection.

"Your affectionate cousin,
"ADA."

The note dropped from her trembling fingers.

"Well ; are you surprised ?" said Courtenay, picking it up.

Florence tried to speak, but she burst into tears.

Certainly, thought Mr. Courtenay, leaning back in his chair, I have no genius for these affairs ; I don't understand them. What is she crying about, I wonder ? She refused Sir Frederic, and now she wants him back again. Ah, that is it !

"I really wish I could offer to be of some assistance to you," he said ; "but in a case like this it is utterly impossible—he is lost to you for ever."

To his infinite surprise she slid from her chair on her knees, just before him, in an agony of tears. What now ? he thought to himself ; but he did not make any inquiries. He merely attempted to raise her ; she resisted him.

"For Heaven's sake !" she said, "let me appeal to your compassion once more. I was mad last night ; in my distress I begged you to let our engagement proceed. Break it ! break it ! things can be no worse ; I can suffer no more, whatever may be my father's displeasure ! Go to him, Mr. Courtenay, go at once ! Tell him that at last I have asserted my own will ! That I will not marry !"

"Presently," said Mr. Courtenay, succeeding at last in lifting her upon the sofa, and taking his seat beside her.

"My aunt Creswick will receive me," said Florence ; "I think she will ; I have in this committed no crime ; I have allowed myself to be frightened at a shadow ; after all, what is it that my father will withdraw from me ? Not his love, not his esteem—I never had them—merely his protection ; well, I will learn to support myself."

"But this time your decision must be final," said Mr. Courtenay.

"It is," said Florence.

"Well, then," said Courtenay, "I first going to Forrel Court to settle a little business of my own, and then I must proceed to Erlsmede, for Ada will want to talk over her match with me, and then I will bring Mrs. Creswick back with me ; for in case there should be anything of a row, you will be glad to have her on the spot. And after dinner I will explain to Mr. Reynolds how we stand."

"Oh, thank you ! You have indeed been very kind throughout !"

"You will give me a character then," said Mr. Courtenay, taking up his hat, "if I should feel disposed to enter the service of another lady ? *Au revoir.*"

It was still raining hard ; Courtenay ordered his horse, and galloped immediately to Forrel Court.

As he entered the library, Maud turned hastily from the casement

and came to the table where she had been drawing in water-colours.

"You were looking out of the window," said Courtenay.

"I was," returned Maud; "I have read till I am tired, painted till I am tired, and I am idle to-day. I was actually watching the rain as if that would do any good."

Then suddenly recollecting that he had ridden through it, she said:

"I should not wonder if you were wet."

"No, I had a mackintosh; not that you would mind if I were."

"I mind the weather though," said Maud, seating herself at her drawing-frame, "it makes me feel so dull. They shouldn't have let you in; papa and Leonard have driven over to Erlsmede this morning, to see Karl; but I suppose the rain made them compassionate."

"I meant to come in at any rate," said Courtenay. "I'm come for my gardenia."

"*Plâit-il?*" said Maud, looking up.

"I left it on the mantelpiece in the ball-room," said Courtenay.

"Mr. Courtenay," said Maud, "if the servants had found *you* on the mantelpiece, it is possible they might have taken care of you; but I'm afraid there is no chance for your gardenia. However, if you wish it, I'll ring and inquire."

"No; let us talk," said Courtenay.

"To be sure," said Maud, leaning over her sketch and painting very busily. "How did you like the ball?"

"Not so much as I expected," said Courtenay. "I danced but once with you; you were always engaged."

"How are they all at Heathfield?" asked Maud.

"Oh, we have had a scene this morning," said Courtenay. "Miss Reynolds has discarded me; don't you pity me?"

"What have you been doing?" exclaimed Maud, holding her brush suspended.

"Nothing—I give you my word; she finds I am not to her taste."

"Well, that can't be wondered at!" said Maud, turning round and searching among her colours.

"Are you in earnest?" said Courtenay.

Maud made no answer; she went on turning over her paints.

"For some time past we have understood each other that the affair should proceed no farther," said Courtenay; "but we closed accounts this morning."

"Ah, indeed!" said Maud, who did not like to appear too much interested by his news.

"Well, Miss Warrenne, what do you think of it?" asked Courtenay, drawing his chair to her side, and looking over her sketch.

"Think of it, Mr. Courtenay? what a question!" replied Maud, half laughing.

"Well?" said Courtenay.

"Why, I think this—that a great deal is now cleared up which seemed mysterious in you, and a great deal still left in obscurity; which is one element of the sublime, you know."

And then she dashed a great dark mass of shadow half across her sky.

"I wish you would leave off painting and talk to me!" said Courtenay.

Maud laid down her brush, turned her chair a little way round, clasped her hands in her lap, and gave him a look from her great sparkling grey eyes, half comic, half amazed.

"Well, Mr. Courtenay, it is for you to begin," she said.

"There is no weather that could long make you dull," he exclaimed, fascinated by her manner.

"Very well," replied Maud; "now shall I go on painting, if you please?"

"What do you think of me? tell me frankly," said Mr. Courtenay, looking earnestly at her.

"Well, then; I *will* tell you, Mr. Courtenay—in reference to this affair, of course."

He made a sign of assent.

"It always appeared to me," said Maud, "that you had no attachment to Miss Reynolds. You will tell me that it was not your way to attach yourself to any one; very likely you can't help that; but when you think for a moment to what people pledge themselves when they marry—good Heavens! with indifference, perhaps even contempt at your heart—to take those vows! You have had a very narrow escape!"

"I have; I feel it," said Courtenay. "I looked down upon Miss Reynolds, yet in this affair she was more conscientious than I—that is not a thing to be forgotten."

"Miss Reynolds appears to be very much improved," said Maud, wishing to say something, and feeling more and more embarrassed that Mr. Courtenay chose to confide his private affairs to her.

"Not my way to attach myself to any one," said Courtenay, after a silence of some minutes, during which he had been turning about her pencils and brushes in an abstracted manner; "why the impression you made on me when a child has never been effaced! You have been the plague of my life for the last two years—ever since I met you at the Creswicks! You drove me to offer myself to a woman I did not care for—I love you. I know you are not engaged. That is enough—you shall not escape me again. We will settle the rest at our leisure!"

"I hate you with my whole heart!" exclaimed Maud, bursting suddenly into tears, and disengaging her hand with some difficulty from his. "You are always rude! You don't know how to behave to a woman! You have no business to talk to me as if I had no

voice in the matter—you treat me very ill—and I hope with all my might I may never see you again!”

Here she dried her eyes hastily, and walked to the window.

“If you mean every word of that,” said Courtenay, following her, “if you thoroughly hate me, let us say ‘good-bye’ to each other. I will never come into your presence again. If I cannot obtain your regard, if you do not understand the love I bear you, I will do without it—let us part at once!”

He held out his hand.

“You are the proudest, most obstinate, disagreeable creature I ever saw!” said Maud, with a sob in her voice; “I don’t want you to go away altogether; I am used to your company—you know I should miss it, and that makes you so ill-natured!”

“Oh, I don’t mind your abusing me,” said Courtenay, taking her hand, “that’s a matter of course!”

“You never said a thing to me,” continued Maud, wiping her eyes at intervals, and still leaning her head against the window, “that might lead me to think you liked me; we always quarrelled—that was amusing—but you never expressed your feelings; and now you talk as if I could not comprehend a loyal attachment—as if I were a wretch!”

“Oh, I think you a wretch!” said Courtenay, drawing still nearer to her, “that is the reason I wish to marry you as soon as possible.”

“Talking so roughly about marrying,” said Maud, colouring over neck and brow, “and never having said one civil thing to me since I first saw you!”

“Never having made a catalogue, like little Red Riding Hood, of your features,” said Courtenay smiling. “‘What fine eyes you have got, grandmamma! What fine teeth you have got, grandmamma!’ I thought you knew all that, without my telling you. Beside, you don’t give me much time; for until this morning I have not been quite at liberty to express the admiration I really feel for you.”

“And if you did care for me, how shockingly you have behaved,” said Maud.

“I have.”

“It would have been bad enough if you had not cared for Miss Reynolds; but when you cared all the time for some one else—”

“Worse and worse,” said Courtenay.

“And I don’t believe you are really feeling sorry for what you have done.”

“Not at this particular moment,” he replied.

“And again, if you have the least idea that I ever intend to leave papa, you are quite mistaken,” said Maud, her eyes filling fast with tears.

“You shall do as you like; we will stay with your father, and he shall stay with us: that is easily settled.”

“Us!” exclaimed Maud.

“You and me,” replied Mr. Courtenay, quietly.

"I wish you would go," said Maud, still looking steadily out of the window, and finding some difficulty in keeping back her tears; "you ought not to have been admitted. I wish you would go."

"So I will directly," said Mr. Courtenay, without offering any lover-like opposition to the request; "I have plenty to do; I expect we shall have a great row this evening with old Reynolds."

"What! Does he not know yet?" asked Maud, turning round eagerly.

"Not he; the lawyer has just arrived to make the settlements."

"How curious! I wonder how the explanation will go off," exclaimed Maud.

"As I have every intention of coming over here to-morrow," said Courtenay, "I shall then be able to tell you."

"It is a great price to pay for one's news," said Maud, "that you should be the bearer of them."

"Ah, you can't help yourself! I won't take a denial," said Courtenay; "but as you have such fine eyes, let me recommend that you don't spoil them with crying."

"I was not crying!" said Maud, indignantly.

"I thought you were," said Courtenay, venturing to touch her wet cheek with his lips; "good-morning."

CHAPTER XLI.

TOO LATE.

"WHAT on earth could Courtenay have to say to my father?" said Leonard, coming in almost as soon as Mr. Courtenay had left the room; "he met us just as we drove up to the door, and begged 'to have a few minutes' conversation with Mr. Warrenne.'"

"Why, you see, Leonard, that he is such a very odd person, this Mr. Courtenay," said Maud, looking rather confused; "he took it into his head—he came here to say—he's so foolish—that man!"

Maud walked quickly to the window and back again.

"Why, what had he to say then?" said Leonard, smiling.

"Oh, he has been so stupid, he has managed so badly, that his engagement with Miss Reynolds is entirely broken off," said Maud, as carelessly as she could.

"Off! You don't mean it?" exclaimed Leonard, rushing towards her.

"I do, indeed; very clumsy he must have been," said Maud, smiling.

"But, my dear—broken—so very near! Oh, Maud, you are dreaming—quite—utterly broken off?"

"Utterly, I should hope," said Maud, "since he has had the assurance to—make the agreeable to me."

Leonard caught his sister in his arms—then rushed to the bell.

"My horse, directly!" he exclaimed, as the servant appeared.

"Where *are* you going?" asked Maud.

"To Heathfield," he said; and left the room as he spoke.

"Oh, I see! how blind I have been all this time," said Maud, looking after him as he galloped from the door; "and the grandfather was right, after all. How provoking!"

Florence went to sit with Mrs. Reynolds in her boudoir, after her agitating conversation with Courtenay.

Mrs. Reynolds, in her delicate white dressing-gown, was half lying on a sofa, engaged upon some pretty little frivolous bit of needlework.

"Well, Florence, dear," she said, looking up, "I'm half-dead. How are you?"

"Not very well," replied Florence. "In fact, I never felt so ill in my life. I have a singular oppression here," touching her heart.

"I think you want a little change," said Mrs. Reynolds; "if you were not so very soon to be married, I think I would ask papa to take us to Brighton or Leamington. Have you settled where you are to go for your wedding tour?"

"No," said Florence. "Do you think," she added, with some hesitation, "papa would take it so very much amiss, if I were to determine to remain single?"

"Oh, my dear, don't breathe a word of such a thing. Papa is so doatingly fond of Mr. Courtenay, and he really is such a delightful man! When his father dies he will have a beautiful estate. I'm sure, if I were single, I would not hesitate a moment; think what a duty it is, my dear Florence, to settle well!"

Here Mrs. Reynolds' maid came in to say that Mr. Warrenne-Digby was in the drawing-room and desired to see Mrs. Reynolds.

"To see me? In this *peignoir*—I can't go down; dearest Florence, just go down and see him for me. Tell him his ball was divine, and that I was in ecstasies the whole evening; and say that I thought his waistcoat in such good taste. And that Maud looked most beautiful and broke no end of hearts; and—oh! ask him the name of the man who played the harp; I should not wonder if he could give me a few lessons; he had a very fine finger."

It was impossible for Florence to refuse, however reluctant she felt to fulfil this mission; she descended the staircase with a beating heart. Leonard rose hastily and bowed, as she entered; they had not shaken hands since—oh, ages ago.

Although she had, as Sir Frederic said, lost very much of that brilliancy of complexion which the finest painting could not have rivalled, the beauty of her features and the singular grace of her movements would always render her conspicuous. She seemed to him as beautiful as ever.

"Mrs. Reynolds has not yet left her room, Mr. Warrenne-Digby,"

said Florence, taking her seat ; "she is easily fatigued, even when she is most amused, so she has sent me to say a thousand things on her part to you about your charming ball."

"It was you I wish to see," replied Leonard, in a trembling voice. "I asked for Mrs. Reynolds that she might procure me the privilege of saying a few words to you alone."

Her heart seemed to contract, as if she could neither breathe nor speak. He felt as he used to do, when a glance from her had the power to make him change colour.

"I am occupied with but one thought at this moment," he said ; "it is that you are free."

Florence turned pale as death.

"If the past were impressed on your heart, as it is on mine," he continued, "as the first great sorrow I ever endured, I might ask you if you remembered that I once pledged myself to offer you all the aid in my power, if you should ever need the help of a brother."

Florence covered her face with her hands.

"At that time," said Leonard, "such an offer must have appeared to you presumptuous, at least, absurd—for I was utterly without resources, and in a condition of life that—that hardly excused even the desire I felt to serve you."

Florence could not speak—her tears fell through her fingers.

"Yet, even then," he said, "my devotion hardly merited to be repulsed with so much scorn—a love so hopeless is bitter enough in itself—and mine was hopeless, though you can never tell how true!"

Her head sank on the arm of the chair ; her face still hidden by her hands.

"Do not think that in alluding to the past, I mean to reproach you with your scorn—I would only recall to you that I then placed my future life and means at your disposal. And I may be permitted to look back with some pride upon my attachment, since it has survived even your contempt—the sternest test, believe me, to which you can put a lover's constancy."

Her emotion shook her from head to foot, but she could find no words.

"Florence!" exclaimed Leonard, approaching nearer and taking her hand, "you are changed since then—a little changed—you are not quite so proud—you will not answer me with disdain, however you may decide! you are not happy; they do not understand you here—your father is even harsh to you. Ah! you do not know how I have felt all that has happened to you since we parted; well, I offer you a home—I will make you happy in it—trust at last to me! In time you will return my love."

"Don't, you kill me!" sobbed Florence, convulsed with agitation—"too generous! I was never worthy of you; but now, when I have lost the beauty that made me vain, even the riches that drew around me so many flatterers——"

"Nay, riches!" said Leonard, reproachfully.

"I love you too well to accept you," she continued. "I don't know when I first began to love you. I would have given anything to recall that scene when I spoke so abominably! I was mad, I think!"

Leonard, falling on to his knees, covered her hands with kisses.

"Come, sit here," said Florence. "I could die of shame to see you kneeling to *me*."

"You love me—then you accept me?" said Leonard, before he rose.

"I do—I will," said Florence. "Yet, oh, Leonard, I feel as if I should never live to marry any one. A strange weight, a strange presentiment oppresses me. Something whispers to me that my hours are numbered. The misery I have endured has been too much for me; it has killed me. Twice since last night I have fainted, and the last time my maid was really alarmed."

She placed her hand to her heart as she spoke; it was beating rapidly, violently; there was a strange blueness about her lips. Leonard also felt alarmed as he looked at her, but the thought that she was nervous and overwrought calmed him. It would pass away.

"And I think—if I died"—panted Florence, "it were better so. My life has been a terrible mistake, but I am truly penitent. No one would miss me or mourn me; no one but—you, Leonard."

She drooped her head on his shoulder, and his arms clasped around her. For a moment, with her eyes closed, so quiet and still was she that the beating of her heart was both visible and audible. She looked almost like death itself.

"My darling," he murmured, "this will pass away, and you will recover health and spirits. The happy always do, and I will make you happy. You have been too much tried; the ordeal has been too great; but it is over. I think that all is well now."

Florence shook her head sadly, and at that moment Mr. Reynolds opened the door, and walked straight into the room.

Florence uttered a cry of terror. Leonard gently placed her head upon the cushion of the sofa and went directly up to him.

"Mr. Reynolds," he said, "I have loved your daughter for several years, long before Mr. Courtenay ever saw her. I learn for the first time to-day that my love is returned; my claim is earlier than his—I entreat you to grant me her hand."

"Mr. Warrenne-Digby," said Mr. Reynolds, "I am flattered and proud that you distinguish my daughter by your regard. Had your application been earlier, I should have been truly happy to have received it favourably—indeed, so highly do I esteem you, that I can hardly tell on which my preference would have fallen—you or my excellent friend, Mr. Courtenay. But my word is given to him, and it would be very injurious to my daughter if, after her former conduct, there were any vacillation now in her proceedings; her last decision

must be irrevocable. I would never pardon her breaking her faith to Mr. Courtenay."

"Papa!" cried Florence, approaching and sinking at his feet, "do not destroy me! I have suffered so much that I can bear no more. Forgive me; I can never marry Mr. Courtenay!"

"It appears to me," said Mr. Reynolds, "that you have a very erroneous opinion of your duty. I came into this room, expecting to find Mr. Courtenay here, that I might have his advice upon the settlements, which Mr. Young is now sketching out in my study. I did not anticipate any scene of this nature. I am perfectly astonished that you hesitate for a moment in the fulfilment of your engagement; but I remind you that I lend no sanction to such duplicity; in another month you would come to implore me to break with Mr. Warrenne-Digby. You had better rise."

She tried mechanically to obey him, but, in doing so, she reeled, and fell heavily to the ground.

Leonard rushed to her, and raised her from the floor.

"Good Heavens! Mr. Reynolds—she is dead!" he cried, observing with a pang of terror, that, instead of the paleness that accompanies a swoon, her forehead was deeply flushed.

"You are mistaken," said Mr. Reynolds, glancing at his daughter, and then crossing to ring the bell. "Florence has fainted—a very common practice with young ladies when they are agitated—the result of a weak habit of indulgence, which is indeed too prevalent in the present day."

Leonard, on his knees beside the sofa on which he had placed Florence, was pressing her cold hand to his lips. He did not seem to heed this explanation.

Louise entered, but not being able to carry her young lady without assistance, Mr. Reynolds, desiring Leonard to await his return, took her up in his arms and bore her to her room.

When he returned, he placed two chairs just opposite to each other (it is singular that all his ways were angular), and assuming one himself, he signed to Leonard to take the other.

"I wish explicitly to state to you," said Mr. Reynolds, "that under any other circumstances I should be deeply gratified by the preference you have shown my daughter. I do not wish you to go away with the idea that I undervalue your character, or that I am not sensible of the very excellent establishment it is in your power to offer to your wife; but you must be aware that Florence has been too much talked of already. Another change would occasion all kinds of surmises. It is my duty to shield her name as long as she remains under my roof; and I beg you to understand it is on this account, and on no other, that I am induced to decline your addresses. Until Florence is married, you will comprehend that it is desirable for both your sakes, that you should not meet; but afterwards, I hope I may be allowed to number you among my most valued guests."

"Pardon me," said Leonard, "I am hardly capable of attending to what you say; I am occupied with but one idea. Will you allow me to ring and inquire how Miss Reynolds is?"

Mr. Reynolds, in reply to this remark, laid his watch down on the table.

"It is now three minutes since I left her," he said, "we must allow a quarter of an hour for these attacks; she will then be as well as ever. I will send to ask after her in that time."

He sat looking grimly at his watch.

"Mr. Reynolds," said Leonard, "I can but hope that your decision is not final—that for a mere feeling of etiquette you will not destroy the happiness of our lives. If you had ever loved, you would feel the cruelty of your present determination."

"Like most young people," said Mr. Reynolds, "you think your present feelings are to last your life; you imagine that you are never to recover from a disappointment; that because your feelings are ardent, they are also indelible. Dreams! dreams!"

He spoke with more softness than was common to him, it seemed as if some recollection crossed his mind.

"My feelings have lasted some years, supported by no hope, no shadow of probability," said Leonard, "it is therefore likely that they will survive your prohibition."

"When I was young," said Mr. Reynolds, "I also loved a lady as much as you loved my daughter. I believe that my love was returned; her father seemed to approve my addresses. At length he died, and left her, a rich heiress if she remained single, a beggar if she accepted my hand."

"I know—I have heard," said Leonard.

"I knew that the generosity of her disposition would prompt her to forego an inheritance for my sake," continued Mr. Reynolds, "but I felt that such a sacrifice was unreasonable for her to make, or for me to claim. I felt that in urging her to follow me to the unhealthy climate where my own prospects led me, I not only demanded her to risk health and life, but to resign opulence and indulgence in her own country. I felt that the time might come when she would regret her decision, and for *her* sake, not my own, I resolved to resign my pursuit of her hand. I was aware that explanations would but render our parting more difficult and painful, I therefore denied myself even a farewell, and left this country, never to see her again. Yet I have lived to wear out this remembrance. You have yet to experience the beneficial effects of time."

"And this man thought he did right," said Leonard to himself; "it is vain to appeal to him."

At this moment Mr. Courtenay and Mrs. Creswick entered the room.

"Oh, Mrs. Creswick," said Leonard, "I am in the greatest anxiety about Miss Reynolds—I fear she is very ill. Let me entreat you to go up and see her."

"I will go at once," said Mrs. Creswick, and she left the room.

Mr. Courtenay then advanced to Mr. Reynolds.

"I must absolutely beg to decline fulfilling my engagement with your daughter, Mr. Reynolds," he said. "She has declared to me her positive repugnance to my addresses. Her heart is entirely occupied by another person. (I should not wonder if it were you, Moonshine, after all.) Under these circumstances, no man of honour can for one moment think of urging his suit. However, then, I may regret that I shall no longer enjoy the advantage of your alliance, I must positively and finally withdraw my claim."

Mr. Courtenay then bowed with an air of decision, and stepped back a pace, as if he said—for all his gestures were expressive—"I back out of the concern altogether!"

"Then, Mr. Warrenne-Digby," said Mr. Reynolds, "as Mr. Courtenay declines marrying my daughter, from honourable, though perhaps rather fastidious motives, I have no longer any reason for withholding my consent from you. I give it you with all my heart—may you be happy together."

As Leonard pressed the hand which Mr. Reynolds extended towards him, Mrs. Creswick appeared on the threshold, pale, calm, and breathless.

"Mr. Reynolds," she said, "I don't quite like my niece's appearance. I should be glad if you would send for Mr. Warrenne. I know he is at Forrel Court, and I am sure he would kindly come."

"Has she not recovered from her swoon?" asked Mr. Reynolds.

"She is quite insensible," said Mrs. Creswick, "but she is not fainting, for she breathes; and this it is that alarms me."

"My father is at Forrel!" exclaimed Leonard. "I'll go directly. I'll bring him—I——"

"Sit down," said Courtenay, observing that Leonard's sudden paleness, the more striking in so dark a person, rendered it probable that he would not reach Forrel at all. "That is your horse? I'll ride him over and find Mr. Warrenne."

He was off directly.

"Oh, my forebodings! Oh, my golden dreams!" murmured Leonard, covering his face, and quoting unconsciously the exclamation of old Moor in Schiller's drama.

"Do not alarm yourself," said Mr. Reynolds calmly; "Florence is probably nervous. I will go up and see her myself."

Mr. Warrenne was soon at Heathfield; Mrs. Creswick took him up to Florence. Mrs. Reynolds was seated, by the pillow terrified, Mr. Reynolds, with his arms folded, standing at the foot of the bed.

They had undressed her, and she lay breathing as if in a deep sleep, her beautiful hair scattered all over the pillow.

When Mrs. Reynolds saw Mr. Warrenne gravely examining his patient, and particularly feeling her head, as if he suspected that she

had given herself a severe blow in falling, she felt it to be serious and burst into tears. Mr. Reynolds led her from the room.

Mrs. Creswick, always active and self-possessed, lent Mr. Warrenne every assistance in applying the usual remedies. But every attempt to restore her to consciousness proved vain.

"She is in a state of coma," said Mr. Warrenne; "the agitation she has undergone has been too much for her nerves, weakened by previous indisposition. It would be a satisfaction to me if you would send for a physician. But there is dangerous heart-mischief. I fear it can have but one termination."

"And you think——?" questioned Mrs. Creswick earnestly.

"That she will not live twelve hours!" replied Mr. Warrenne.

Leonard, who had begged to be allowed to remain in the house "until Miss Reynolds should be better," for he could not bear to glance at the other alternative, spent his time in pacing up and down the drawing-room for hours; sometimes stopping to lean against the wall from exhaustion, then beginning to walk again. Courtenay, who sincerely pitied him, would not leave him alone; but he was wiser than to rack him with consolations.

It was indeed a hard trial to lose her, just when every difficulty was made smooth, and after so long and hopeless an attachment.

Mr. Reynolds went himself for the physician. He had four horses to his carriage, and he calculated that he should bring him by day-break.

Mrs. Creswick looked despondingly at Mr. Warrenne. She thought it was likely that all would be over by that time.

He consented to stay that night at Heathfield. He said himself that he could be of no further use; that the physician was for the survivors, and not for the patient; but as his presence was a comfort to Mrs. Creswick, he was willing to remain. He tried to persuade his son to go home, but nothing would induce Leonard to stir from the house while she lived. Indeed, with the pertinacity of people in great mental suffering, he could not be made to believe the extent of her danger—he fancied that a favourable change must occur.

Every ten minutes he paused in his hurried walk to beg Mr. Courtenay to go up-stairs and inquire how Miss Reynolds was going on.

Mr. Courtenay never hesitated in going up directly, and came back with exactly the same message—that no favourable change had occurred.

During the early part of the night Florence lay breathing heavily, to all appearance in the same state; but in a few hours her breathing became more faint, her pulse weaker, and now and then there stole across her face and limbs a contraction which told to the experienced eye of Mr. Warrenne that the end was not far off.

Then Mr. Courtenay had to bring back the message that she was gradually sinking.

Leonard's despair was terrible and therefore silent. He seemed crushed when he found that no interval of consciousness was likely to

intervene; that he had spoken to her for the last time; that all the thousand things he had to say and ask must now remain for ever unspoken. Some people never suffer in this way; but those who do grow old under it.

Yet still Mr. Courtenay had hardly brought him news when he entertained him in an accent of despair to go again.

"It is a little like the treadmill," said Courtenay to himself, as he quietly ascended the staircase for about the hundredth time; "but everything has an end; I think I hear the carriage."

Leonard waited for his return, usually so rapid, but no footsteps came; the cold dawn was stealing in across the shutters; at last a lighter step approached; he sank down on a chair with a foreboding at his heart. Mrs. Creswick, her eyes dimmed with tears, came to his side, and laid beside him a long silken ringlet of fair hair.

Florence had just breathed her last.

At that moment the carriage stopped at the door. Mr. Reynolds had brought the physician to see his daughter.

CHAPTER XLII.

MRS. CRESWICK TO THE RESCUE.

PERHAPS it may occur to some persons that when Mr. Reynolds found his daughter was actually dead, there mingled with his natural regrets some shadow of remorse for the harshness with which he had treated her. Not at all, I give you my word. He believed himself to have been the tenderest as well as the most judicious of fathers, and went into an ecstasy of admiration whenever he remembered how he had posted up to London with four horses to fetch the physician, rewarded him with fifty guineas, and sent him back again after breakfast.

Leonard demanded, almost as his right, that he should be the chief mourner at her funeral; he felt that it would be almost a sacrilege were any one to fulfil that duty who had loved her less than himself; and Mr. Reynolds was so far touched by his unfeigned grief, that although he was very much under the influence of what people might say, he acceded to his request. For once his feeling prevailed over his sense of etiquette; he was second at his own daughter's funeral.

Mr. Reynolds then caused a splendid monument of white marble to be erected in Forrel Church, as if (Mr. Courtenay said) he was quite determined that Leonard should never hear the last of it; and, then, having done everything that propriety and affection could dictate, he dismissed the subject from his mind.

On Mrs. Reynolds it had more effect; she was a good deal sobered by the shock. And yet *she* had nothing to reproach herself

with : she had been uniformly kind to Florence ; she had done nothing but stand in her place.

* * * *

"I suppose, if you are not a cannibal," said Maud, drying her eyes as Courtenay finished giving her an account of the funeral which had just taken place ; "you are glad that you behaved tolerably to poor Miss Reynolds, now that she is dead."

"Not being a cannibal," replied Mr. Courtenay, "I make a point of behaving tolerably to people whether they live or die."

"What will become of poor Leonard I don't know," said Maud ; "he shuts himself up and never speaks a word. Papa can do nothing with him."

"He does very wisely," said Courtenay. "I daresay there is nothing he wishes to make known, and therefore he is silent. The first thing to be decided is, what will become of *us* ; when I have got you to make up your mind upon that subject, I will find out what to do with Leonard."

"You take things so coolly," replied Maud ; "I think I should die happy if I could once see you cry."

"Well, when you are about to die, let me know, and I will try to accommodate you."

"You are a hateful person !" said Maud ; "but still I will own it was kind of you to give Leonard that beautiful miniature of poor Miss Reynolds."

"Yes, it was very liberal, as I did not at all want it myself," replied Courtenay ; "I shall soon replace it directly I get you to town. I shall make you sit to Thorburn."

"I won't live in London !" said Maud.

"Don't," replied Courtenay ; "we will live in Devonshire."

"That's so far from papa," said Maud.

"We will take a house then at Erlsmede."

"I don't like the Erlsmede people," said Maud.

"Depend upon it they are just like all other people," said Courtenay ; "the breed is everywhere the same. When they see you with two or three carriages, and so forth, you will find them the sweetest, most complaisant creatures in the world."

"Many thanks to them," said Maud.

"Well, we need not trouble ourselves to fix on a residence till we have settled when we are likely to be in want of it. Come—what say you ?"

"I suppose you know," said Maud, "that all the neighbours imagine to this day, that you were on the point of marriage with Miss Reynolds ; it would, therefore, not be very decent in you even to think of such things at present. If you could manage to show a little more feeling, it would not disgrace you, when you consider that everybody is pitying poor Mr. Courtenay's sufferings !"

"Come, this won't do," said Mr. Courtenay ; "you and I are so

well matched in our veneration for 'people' that it is of no use to quote what they think in support of your perverseness."

"I will be perverse!" said Maud.

"I daresay you will, you always have been," said Mr. Courtenay; "but I advise you not to provoke me, or I will run off with you to Gretna Green before you know where you are."

"I would soon make you repent it," said Maud.

"Come, since you care so much on a sudden about what everybody says," exclaimed Courtenay, "I will go round to all the neighbours, and tell them the whole history. I will inform them that I would have married you two years ago, but that you were so proud and self-willed, you actually did not know your own mind; and that you can't make it up now, from fear of their sovereign displeasure. I will ask them severally if they don't think it very hard, under all the circumstances, that I should be kept dawdling about any longer, and I will bring back their votes in my hat, together with the day they think proper to fix for my wedding. Won't that do?"

"I'll never speak to you again!" exclaimed Maud.

Courtenay took up a book.

"As to caring what people think of me," said Maud, turning quickly round, after a few moments' silence; "I'll tell you how much I care! I choose to act so scrupulously that they shall have no shadow of an excuse for finding fault; and then, if they wish to abuse me, let them. It is, perhaps, rather a compliment."

"Oh! you are soon come to life again," remarked Courtenay, looking up.

"Did you hear what I said?" asked Maud.

"Perfectly," he replied.

"And did you see how it applied to all the nonsense you have been talking?" she asked impatiently.

"No; it did not seem at all to bear upon the case in point," he replied; "but it was a very good remark—a very good remark."

"Now that I never will forgive!" exclaimed Maud.

"Quel travail délicat!

Cet ouvrage de femme est d'un goût, d'un éclat!"

said Courtenay, looking over the work-frame at which Maud was employed.

"That's from Delavigne—you have been reading '*Les Enfants d'Edouard*,'" said Maud, taking up Courtenay's book.

"Certainly it is no difficult task to make you speak," said Courtenay; "not like the old woman in the Scotch song, 'Get up and bar the door.'"

"How I hate you!" exclaimed Maud.

"Well, how long do you mean to keep me waiting?" asked Courtenay.

"A hundred years," said Maud.

"And suppose I won't wait?"

"That will be best of all," said Maud; "for it is entirely against my will that I have anything to say to you."

"I know how I'll bring you to reason," said Courtenay. "I'll fetch over Mrs. Creswick to Forrel; she will reduce you to terms. I know you are afraid of her."

"Afraid of her?" echoed Maud. "She is the best friend I have in the world. You can't do better than drive her over to-morrow morning; she will be sure to take my side."

"We shall see," replied Mr. Courtenay; and accordingly the very next morning he drove over to Erlsmede, and brought Mrs. Creswick back with him.

"So, my dear Maud," said Mrs. Creswick, as soon as she entered, "you are resolved, I find, to put your lover's constancy to a pretty strong test; he has waited already two years and a quarter, and you still think it advisable to put him off. Well, I hope it won't be for very long."

"Oh, he has been telling tales of me as you came along," said Maud, darting an angry glance at Mr. Courtenay, who stood quietly leaning against the window.

"Saved you all the trouble of the explanation," he remarked.

"And what time do you really mean to fix for your marriage?" asked Mrs. Creswick; "because, you know, when you talk of a hundred years, why, we should like some of us to be alive to see the day."

"Especially the principals," remarked Courtenay.

"How I hate his dry ways!" exclaimed Maud.

"Some day you will come to me and say, 'How I like his dry ways!'" said Mrs. Creswick.

"That she will," said Courtenay.

"Now listen, Mrs. Creswick," said Maud. "I ask you if that disagreeable person, leaning so awkwardly there against the window-frame, is not a widower in the eyes of the world?"

"Almost, I am afraid," said Mrs. Creswick, smiling.

"How soon is it thought decent for the hardest-hearted and most unfeeling widowers to marry again?"

"Mr. Courtenay?" said Mrs. Creswick, hardly able to refrain from laughing at her manner.

"A hard-hearted widower is permitted to marry again in six months," said Mr. Courtenay, coolly; "but when his heart is extra hard, as in the present case, it is thought reasonable that he should be kept waiting only five weeks."

"What say you; shall he be judge in his own case?" asked Mrs. Creswick.

"No; that he shall not!" said Maud.

"We both agreed to refer our cause to you," said Courtenay.

"Did I?" said Maud.

"Ah; now you want to draw stakes," said Courtenay.

"No ; I think Mrs. Creswick will take my part," said Maud.

"One says five weeks and the other says a hundred years," said Mrs. Creswick.

"Five weeks is perfect nonsense !" exclaimed Maud, eagerly.

"And I am sure so is a hundred years," returned Mr. Courtenay, laughing.

"Then I think we will treat him as one of the hard-hearted widowers," said Mrs. Creswick. "My dear Maud, in six months I may congratulate you by the name of Mrs. Courtenay."

* * * * *

Maud was received with ecstasy by Mr. Courtenay's father and his two maiden aunts, when upon her marriage they went down into Devonshire. The old gentleman was a finished specimen of an older and a better school than the present time can show. She found a stately mansion, an extensive park, everything on a grand scale. The single aunts, richly and quietly dressed, with the air of perfect gentlewomen, did the honours of their brother's house with a pleasing tranquillity. It was evident that everybody idolised Mr. Courtenay ; everything he said, did, or thought, to the veriest trifle, was registered and adopted. His father looked up to him ; his aunts would certainly have walked up to the chin in the lake that ornamented the park if he had dropped the slightest hint that he should like to see them in such a situation. These kind-hearted ladies were also tormented with anxieties respecting his diet, which to a man who never cared and hardly knew what he ate was rather an unnecessary trouble. They would draw Maud aside after breakfast, and inquire whether she had noticed his preference for any particular dish ; would fear that their country cook was unable to prepare the sort of dishes he had been accustomed to in London ; would try and surprise her into confiding to them whether he preferred peas to cauliflowers, or turkey poults to spring chickens ; they disturbed themselves greatly that their melons were backward that year, because he had once in a fit of absence asked for melon with his cheese instead of radishes ; and they became quite agitated whenever they gave a party to know exactly what neighbours he would wish to invite, and whether he liked many or few guests at dinner.

Maud always said they were a thousand times too good to think about him at all, and that he had better answer for himself, to which end she used to call him, and make known to him the subject of discussion in her own way.

"Come here, and thank your aunts for wishing to know whether you like green peas ; or tell your aunts that you never in your life saw such fine strawberries as they gave you at dessert yesterday ; or assure your aunts that you don't eat melons ; and let them know that their cook is equal to the man at the University Club."

Mr. Courtenay gravely echoed her remarks, and left his aunts in perplexity at Maud's boldness, and his wonderful amiability.

Maud, for his sake, would have been upheld as the model of all earthly excellence ; but her beauty, gaiety, and good-temper so won their hearts. that they really did not know how to pay her homage enough ; indeed old Mr. Courtenay remarked to his son that it appeared quite wonderful that with such a brilliant creature as Maud in the neighbourhood, his choice should in the first instance have fallen upon Miss Reynolds. Mr. Courtenay quietly replied that it was rather singular, that there was no accounting for tastes, but that as Miss Reynolds was lost to him, he thought he had supplied her place indifferently well. This conversation happened to pass in Maud's hearing, and the kind aunts looked nervously at her, fearing that she might be pained at being reminded that she had not been first in Mr. Courtenay's regard ; and the eldest of the two, who had once had a disappointment, whispered to her that people, especially young men, never did marry their first loves, and that she hoped Maud had firmness enough not to mind what Charles had said.

Maud assured them that she had sufficient firmness *never* to mind what Charles said ; and as a proof of it, she was going to ride a horse that very day which he had expressly forbidden her to mount.

Although he had an odd way of expressing his attachment, Maud had every reason to believe it was unbounded. He made good what he had once said to Florence—that he could never refuse anything to a person whom he loved. He never opposed Maud's fancies, even when he most disapproved of them. He would coolly say :

"I think it very absurd ; there is no sense in the thing ; but if you wish it, do it."

When she found that this was always the case, the natural generosity of her disposition prevented her making an undue use of his indulgence.

In the autumn they went abroad with Leonard, and they all remained in Italy during the winter. When he returned his friends had no longer occasion to sigh over his morbid inactivity. The suffering he had undergone forced him to turn to the business of life in order to forget its sorrows ; and although many years passed before he was able to admit that another woman could ever possess his heart, yet at last, to the great joy of his family, he gave a mistress to Forrel Court. He "waited for Lucy." At seventeen she was a warm-hearted, amiable girl, and beautiful as a dream. She was always very much with Maud, which Mrs. Reynolds encouraged in the hope that some day something might come of it, and great was her joy when she at last heard that her daughter and Leonard were actually engaged to be married. Mr. Reynolds was equally pleased at the match. He had a vague idea that he owed Leonard some reparation for not having been able to give him his daughter ; and like many hard people, he had taken a singular fancy to him, scarcely inferior to the affection he felt for his own son.

Ada Thomason was as happy as could be expected, considering all

things. Sir Frederic was very fond of her, but he was always getting into difficulties, and then Mr. Courtenay had to be sent for to put things straight again.

Mr. Thomason had prudently tied up his daughter's fortune so carefully, that it was not likely she would ever be actually reduced to beggary; but money was always a source of perplexity to both of them; for Ada was just as improvident as her husband.

Mrs. Thomason liked the match, however. It gave her something to sigh about. Sometimes she could lament over her poor daughter Lady Manning, who was about to increase her family. Sometimes she could moan over Sir Frederic's extraordinary whims and fancies, which were indeed enough to try anybody. Once he fitted up a yacht, and carried Ada off to Iceland; and his first child was born off the coast of Norway. Then he started with his whole establishment for Lisbon, and took a villa at Belem for the summer. Now he would threaten to pull down the Manor House; and then he would build up all sorts of odd towers at the corners, and talk of turning it into a castle. Poor Mrs. Thomason had need to remember that Ada was a baronet's wife, and that a good many young ladies would have been very glad if they could have taken her place, to bear up against the perpetual terrors that assailed her from the Manor House. He built a sledge, and nearly drowned himself and Ada in driving over the ice. He met with all sorts of accidents with hurdle-racing and steeple-chases. But whenever they came to London, Lady Manning was cited everywhere as a great beauty; and, though Mrs. Thomason assured her intimate friends that nobody knew what her daughter's trials and troubles really were, they were both tolerably contented with the lot she had so wilfully chosen.

Mrs. Stapylton married all her four daughters. She managed to engage Mr. Sharpe to Albina, without his having any suspicion of what she was about until it was too late. Report does say that she locked him in the drawing-room one day alone with herself, and there went through such a scene of maternal despair, that even he was softened, and he compassionately offered, if it would be any satisfaction to her, to marry her daughter.

Mr. Meek married Sarah; and when he got a living the next curate married Emily, who had devoted herself to the Sunday-schools when the Cornet of Dragoons went away; and Laura married an old man, who did not dislike red hair.

Manceuvring mothers are sometimes represented as failing, but they much oftener succeed. Only when they do fail, they retire from the field covered with ridicule. But Mrs. Stapylton, who succeeded, was quoted all over the county as the best of mothers.

The military cousin, whom Leonard used to envy, was last heard of in the Greek Isles, where his regiment was stationed, and whence he used to send every now and then to borrow money from Mr. Courtenay. As he was perfectly incapable of doing any good, he

naturally looked about to see if he could do any harm. (I think it is Bolinbroke, who remarks somewhere that the one is a very ordinary consequence of the other;) and having gone over to Athens, not I assure you, with a view of indulging in any classic reminiscences, but merely in the hope of having some fun, he was enabled to break to pieces the head of a figure in one of the finest friezes in the Parthenon.

This was a valuable achievement, for the head was said to be singularly beautiful, and the frieze in a high state of preservation, until it was so cleverly mutilated. Moreover, the enthusiastic Greek who takes care of the Parthenon was thrown into a state of despair and grief, bordering on frenzy, at the destruction of one of his beloved marbles. So that the military cousin had even more fun than he expected, and was very much admired by his companions, though their eulogiums fell far short of those he bestowed upon himself.

It is singular that a fatality seemed to pursue the five degraded wretches who made Miss Reynolds' fortune the subject of a wager. The fate of Captain O'Neill, and of Captain Le Grange has been mentioned, the Count de Merville fell in his turn in a duel at the Bois de Vincennes, Mr. Taylor was drowned at a regatta, and Mr. Roxby's lot was perhaps even less enviable; married to a rich old woman of the most revolting temper and habits, and held up to the derision of all his acquaintance, from the base submission with which he bore her tyrannical caprices.

And Mr. Warrenne lived tranquilly among his children. Keeping up nominally his old house at Erlsmede, where Karl still reigned over the white horse and the greyhound;—but dividing his time as equally as possible between Maud and Leonard; for Alice had her share when he was at home, the distance being near enough to see him every day.

He lived pursuing his botanical researches, and writing his botanical treatises; and doing good to those who were in want of assistance, and almost softening even the acrimony of Mr. Ranger by the mildness of his religious practice—but not—thank Heaven!—*not* loved and respected by everybody around.

Valued by those who honoured worth, and loved by all who sought to imitate the benevolence of his life, he was altogether disliked by those who are afraid of moral dignity, and to whom integrity is a reproach. But he had always been thoroughly indifferent to the applause of men; he did not care and he never sought to inform himself of what people said. He was happy enough in his own family to let the world judge as it pleased, and, moreover, he was singularly happy in being able no longer to call himself a Medical Practitioner.

MRS. HENRY WOOD AND WORCESTERSHIRE.

WRITING of her first stay in London, an American author said that her greatest pleasure lay, not in the associations of celebrated persons and events in real life, but in the connection of the characters and incidents of her favourite author, Dickens, with the places and scenes she visited. As she passed through the streets, or visited famous houses and places, she realized much more vividly that she was in the haunts of Dick Swiveller, Sam Weller, Mrs. Gamp, etc., than in those of the celebrities whose deeds and writings are matters of world-renown.

Something of this feeling is, no doubt, experienced by most imaginative and impressionable persons in a neighbourhood or town endeared to them as the scene of favourite books. It would be a great advantage in many ways, if every novelist of note would, in his writings, "work up" the county or town with which he is most familiar; for, putting fiction aside, the gain to the topographical history and folk-knowledge of England—a very important and too much neglected branch of social history—would be great, and the pleasures of travelling would be considerably heightened. What an interesting and valuable picture of the varied phases of life, of which our little island is the scene, would be presented to a reader, if there were a novelist to do for every county what Mrs. Henry Wood has done for Worcestershire!

Whilst the latter has not confined herself exclusively to the one county in her writings, many of her books, and those in which she evidently took great pleasure herself, were all localized in the Faithful City or its shire.

There are few towns in England which can surpass Worcestershire for historical and antiquarian interests, but as I drive down the Tything, and the Cross, and along dear old High Street, on my occasional visits, for me the celebrities of real life have a very hazy existence; but I always feel that Squire Todhetley, accompanied by Tod and Johnny, is driving Bob and Blister in front of me, and if I put up at the "Star and Garter," I shall surely see them. When the college boys come clattering through the Close at dinner time, and tear off to their respective homes, I can see the young Channings and Yorkes, the Halliburtons and Sankers amongst them, and I always look out specially for dear Stephen Bywater. Many a time I have had lunch at the confectioner's in High Street, from which Toby Sanker used to buy the penny pork-pies for the improvised dinners of that ill-regulated household.

I often walk round the Close, trying to fix on the Channings'

house, and, in fancy, hear Roland Yorke's tremendous peals on the bell. Here is the scene of the tragedy with which the book, bearing his name, opens ; and I never stand at the wall to the west of the beautiful Cathedral, below which the river winds its lovely course, without thinking of the mischievous college boys mounted thereon, throwing poor old Ketch's keys into the swift-flowing water. The sight of a barge floating along, brings to mind poor Charley Channing and his misadventure—a true incident, which we believe really occurred many years ago in the city.

One might continue such recollections indefinitely, so completely is the whole city incorporated with one or other of Mrs. Henry Wood's tales ; but I wish specially to refer here, to the charge occasionally brought against her of exaggeration and improbability in her plots and incidents, a charge which in my opinion is utterly unfounded. In general, all elderly persons, at all events, must have learned, by life's experience, that truth is stranger than fiction, and that it would be almost impossible for a novelist to invent more improbable things than the happenings of real life ; and in particular, I have it on excellent authority, that our authoress had a most remarkable experience of life and people ; and never invented a single plot that had not in it a substratum of truth : truth and fiction being cunningly blended together, as it is in the works of all our greatest novelists, from Scott downwards. And often it will be found that the most improbable incidents are those drawn, not from imagination, but from fact. Though quite unacquainted with Mrs. Henry Wood, and only coming to reside in her county after her death, I have myself met with several exactly parallel cases of some of her incidents.

As it is true that history repeats itself, so is it no less so, that the curious chains of events, and good and evil deeds, which constitute the plots of novels, repeat themselves in real life.

Take the case of the death of John Ollivera, one of the best written but least probable of Mrs. Henry Wood's incidents. A few years ago, an almost precisely similar mystery occurred in the death of a young clergyman at Wolverhampton ; a mystery which I believe has never yet been unravelled.

After all, the tales which fill the several volumes of the Johnny Ludlow Series, are made up of very simple material, the charm and fascination which they have for their thousands of readers, being in the manner of writing, and the accurate pictures of country life and people which they present—pictures as true and distinct as photographs, and which every one feels must have been drawn direct from nature.

Some great man has said that every person's life is worth writing, and would be interesting if written well ; and certainly every small town with the adjacent country can furnish abundant material for such a work as Johnny Ludlow, if only it numbered amongst its inhabitants a literary "witch," who, like Mrs. Henry Wood, could

"make these dry bones live" by the mere force of her genius. In this one little country town, near which I have spent the last five years, I have found at least a dozen families, whose history would make far more interesting and romantic stories than those of the ordinary novel.

But interesting as her pictures of Worcester are, it is in her delineation of the rural life of the county, that one who has lived there can appreciate best Mrs. Henry Wood's thorough acquaintance with her subject and her power of presenting it to others. She has been charged with "unnaturalness" in the language and speech of her country-folk; I have heard people say they were sure that no such dialect could be found in England, and I confess that until I lived amongst them I also was doubtful. But a few months' acquaintance with the uncouth dialect, and curious, grating accent peculiar to this county, convinced me that on this point, more, perhaps, than on any other, Mrs. Henry Wood distinctly knew her work. In real life, as in her novels, these people seem to try how awkwardly they can word their sentences, and how often they can substitute the objective or possessive case for the nominative, and *vice versa*; and how narrow a limit they can put to their verb conjugations. A man will say, "Now, Tom, let we have us dinners." *Be* is generally used for *am* and *are*; and *have* for *has*; while for *have* proper, we hear *haves*.

The scenes of a great portion of Johnny Ludlow's tales are laid in that part of the county which lies between the city and the Lickey Hills, the Severn and the county boundary; Crabb Cot lying just on the dividing line of Worcestershire and Warwickshire. In this area we find some of the prettiest villages, quaintest little towns, and most unspoiled phases of country life that the midland counties can offer. More charming villages than Clent, Hagley, or Ombersley (the scene of Bill Whitney's hunting accident), it would be hard to find; and wandering on a bright summer's morning down the little streets, past their quiet churches and pretty creeper-covered houses and cottages, one feels that one has indeed alighted on the originals of the lovely village which figures under so many different names in the books under discussion.

Worcestershire is remarkable for the number and variety of its country seats, and beautiful half-timbered houses. It is impossible to go far in any direction without meeting with some of the former, of which we find specimens of every description and grade, from the stately old castle and its modern imitation, to the rambling Tudor or Jacobean farmhouse of the well-to-do yeomen, a class of people of sterling worth, well represented in this county, and for whom Mrs. Wood seems to have entertained much respect, recognising and delineating them as the backbone of agricultural prosperity. We meet with them again and again in her books; the family of Coney, in "Johnny Ludlow," being an excellent example. It is with such families that I am best acquainted; and in exactly such a farmhouse as she has often

depicted (that in "Dene Hollow," for instance), I am writing these lines.

This class is frequently the equal of the less wealthy portion of the landed gentry in education, breeding, manner of life, and wealth; (in this respect, indeed, they often have the advantage), the difference being that they *rent*, instead of *own* their land, and generally their houses too. The homesteads are handed down from generation to generation, in some cases for hundreds of years, and they are as dear to the occupants as if they were their own possessions.

The house in which I am now living, is like the family, a typical one of its class, and was built by an ancestor near the site of the original one; and a good deal of the old brick and timber having been used again, it presents a much more antique appearance than it can really lay claim to. The polished oak landing and stairs look strangely out of keeping with the red quarried hall-floor; but in the wide, whitewashed kitchen (evidently built in the days when eight or ten men and women farm-hands sat down every day to share in the contents of the huge baking-oven) everything is in harmony; from the great open fire-place, where one can sit in the chimney corner and watch the smoke ascend straight up towards the sky, to the half-circular oak screen, or settle, and vast oak side-board, with its array of cider jugs and cups.

To speak of Worcestershire without mentioning cider, would certainly be to describe the play of Hamlet with the part of Hamlet left out. What would the dwellers in a non-cider-drinking county, say to the cellars of this house having contained at one time forty hogsheads, each of 100 gallon capacity, and two of 200 gallon, all filled with that delectable beverage one autumn, and emptied before the next? Yet such is a fact, and when one has seen a little of the habits of the people, it ceases to be a wonder. Summer and winter, day and night, beginning directly after breakfast, the cider is always flowing, and it is a matter of the barest civility to offer a jugful to every one who passes through one's yard. But if you wish to see it in *full* flow, just be about the yard on hunt days, when there is a "find" or a "kill" near the house.

Every man, whether he be acquainted with the master of the place or not, by virtue of that freemasonry which seems to exist alike amongst hunting men and cider-drinkers, crowds into the yard or garden, and has a good pull at the fine old Worcester mugs and loving cups, which are refilled as fast as emptied, from the buckets brought up out of the cellar!

One finds not only excellent old furniture, but exquisite antique china and silver in common use amongst these people. I see on the tables, every day, tea-sets and silver-ware, which *nouveaux riches* and curiosity-mongers would gladly buy for drawing-room ornaments.

I do not recollect that Mrs. Henry Wood dwells much on scenery in her novels, excepting in so far as it is necessary to the working-out

or setting of the story—"word-painting" had not become the fashion in the days when her style was formed—but what descriptions she does give us are very clear-cut and distinct, and generally intensely Worcestershire. If I were asked to describe one or two typical bits of the scenery of this county, I could not do better than refer the questioner to the pictures of his home, in the tale of "Francis Radcliffe," for one kind; and to the opening chapters of "Trevlyn Hold" for another. The "setting" of "Dene Hollow," and "The Shadow of Ashlydyat" is also singularly good; and with the neighbourhood of the latter I am well acquainted. But the old, old house surrounded by lofty elms, with their hundreds of cawing rooks, that formed "Selina Radcliffe's Home," is as truly a photograph from nature as any that was ever taken; and one only fails to localize it exactly, because the counterpart is met with so many times in dear, pretty Worcestershire. Mrs. Henry Wood has indeed conferred a distinction upon her county, which can never be too thoroughly recognized or too greatly appreciated.

S. M. C.

NIGHT.

How softly shine these moonbeams pale and clear,
Through balmy air stirred by the summer breeze,
Which rustles lightly through the leafy trees,
Moving the surface of yon silver mere.
Sweet Philomel sing on! No one is near
Save I thy lover! Surely nights like these
Were sent by Heaven to cure the heart's disease:
Bear thou thy part, O singer born to cheer.

Like a cool hand laid on a throbbing head,
Thy face is, Mother Earth, by night and day;
Our tears are soothed away as soon as shed,
When to thy kind brown cheek our cheek we lay;
And thou wilt fold us to thine arms when dead,
Till death's long night for ever pass away!

NORAH McCORMICK.

CHRISTMAS EVE IN THE CHAPEL OF VILLA CRISTINA.

A CHEERFUL white road, flecked with shadows from the golden-branched willows which bordered it, alternating with high greyish-white walls, or vari-tinted peasants' houses. Beyond, a stretch of green and red and purple mountain ; above, a cloudless, deep blue sky. These were the main impressions grasped by my somewhat tired powers of observation, as I drove from the Pistoia station to the villa of my friends the Gherardi, one Christmas Eve some few years ago.

I had made a mistake and arrived at Pistoia at 2.30 instead of at six o'clock. Consequently neither my friend Hilda nor her husband was there to meet me : I therefore engaged one of the shabby little fiacres outside the station, and requested its whip-cracking, top-hatted driver to take me to Villa Cristina.

Our progress was slow ; but the warmth and brightness were so delightful that I should not have minded had the road been twice as long. At last we turned into an open gateway, and drove up a winding road bordered by low hedges of rose-bushes, bright with crimson seed-pods, and stopped before a large grey stone villa with a wide gravel terrace. Before the driver had time to descend from the box, the hall door was flung open, and my friend Hilda ran down the half-dozen steps to welcome me, full of regrets at the mistake which had given me so lonely a drive.

"You must be exhausted," she continued, as we entered the enormous hall. "I shall take you straight to your rooms, and you must rest till dinner."

"I am really far more dusty than tired—for I slept well last night—you know I am a good traveller ; and the carriage was not crowded. But do just as you like with me—only I think I should be the better, and better-looking, for some soap and hot water. Don't you ?"

Hilda laughed ; and, putting her arm through mine, led me up a curious frescoed staircase, along a corridor, and into a charming boudoir, where a bright wood-fire was burning. Beyond this was my bed-room, where I removed my travel stains, and then rejoined Hilda who was sitting by the boudoir fire.

First conversations between friends who have been separated for several years are rarely satisfactory. Perhaps this comes from the fact that the great amount each has to say and ask necessitates the impressionist manner of treating each subject ; and, as friends naturally desire detailed descriptions, the mere superficial summary of facts causes that vague feeling of disappointment we have all experienced on such occasions.

My talk with Hilda was no exception to this rule, and I think it

was a relief to both of us when the servant brought in tea, and asked if he should tell the Signorina.

"Certainly," Hilda answered; adding, as the man left the room: "It won't tire you, having Beatrice Sartori for tea, will it? She is longing to see you, and is all alone; every one else is out."

"Of course not," I answered. "I was so glad to know she was with you, poor child! How is she? Do you think she is at all less unhappy?"

"Not much as yet; in fact, I sometimes think she misses her mother more as time goes on—you will understand, for you saw how much they were to each other. And then there is something else which troubles her; only she must tell you that herself; I know she is really fond of you."

Two years before, I had met Marchesa and Beatrice Sartori, at Schwalbach, and made great friends with them. Marchesa Sartori, an English woman by birth, and a widow, was already extremely ill, and she died the spring preceding my story, leaving Beatrice to the guardianship of her father's cousin, Piero Gherardo, husband of my friend Hilda.

Beatrice came in quickly, and greeted me with warm Italian demonstrativeness; tears were in her eyes, but were not allowed to fall. She looked even prettier than formerly, though very delicate; perhaps a trifle too slight in figure, and her features a shade too defined; but her eyes, large-pupilled and grey, looked softer than ever, with the purple shade below them, and the lights in her brown hair more golden, contrasted with the blackness of her dress.

During tea, I inquired if there were any other guests in the house; for Hilda, an impossible correspondent, had only mentioned Beatrice when inviting me.

"Oh yes, quite a family gathering," she answered. "Piero's sister and her husband, and children, the Carpacci; also Piero's two brothers, Mario and Vincenzo—the latter a priest, you know."

"Yes; you really did happen to mention having a priest brother-in-law in one of your first letters, but you never told me about the other, Mario."

"Really? how funny of me, for he is the remarkable one of the family. My dear husband is as good as gold, but he never pretends to be a shining light of intelligence. In fact, Piero and Laura have always been called the stupid ones of the family, and as far as she is concerned—bless her!—the term is pretty well deserved."

I laughed.

"But Mario," she continued, laughing also, "is quite an important personage; he is a deputy, but also a philanthropist and social reformer; a modern practical Don Quixote, in fact, and with a craze for the English, their social and moral institutions—so you are safe to get on with him, my Eleanor."

A knock at the door, and a message from her husband, interrupted

Hilda. Conte Piero begged her to give him a few minutes for some matter of business ; and she went immediately, telling Beatrice to look after me.

When left alone, I tried to tell her—what of course I had already written—how deeply I felt for her. There is always very little that can be *said* ; but I believe any real sympathy is somehow *felt*, and is just a little help and comfort.

I gathered that what Beatrice found hardest was her loneliness, the thought that no one needed her. They were all most kind, most good to her, but after the mutual dependence, the oneness of heart and interests, that had existed between her and her mother, it was inexpressibly painful to find herself unneeded, and, in a way, an outsider. To feel oneself alone in the midst of kindness is perhaps harder to bear than actual solitude, by dint of contrast with the fulness of the lives around one.

I felt, however, that there was, as Hilda had hinted, some other trouble. But Beatrice in no way alluded to it, and I did not attempt to guess. I knew I should hear about it in due time. Some people are born to be told things : and though it is doubtless more interesting to be born to have them to tell, it is well to be philosophical, and remember, there is yet a third category,—those who are born neither to hear nor to tell.

I made acquaintance with the rest of the family at dinner, a very cheery meal, in a large hall painted with a landscape of trees, and hills, and sky.

Hilda's and the Carpacci's children were, in Italian fashion, present, and took up a good deal of every one's attention. I sat between my host and Padre Vincenzo the priest, and found the latter most attractive. He was rather *distract* in manner, but possessed of an almost tender courtesy, and the most charming of smiles.

Beatrice sat between two of the children, and Mario Gherardo next one of them. He was tall and dark, and handsome, with the marked profile of an old Roman coin. Like Padre Vincenzo, and in contrast to Madame Carpacci and Piero, he was almost ascetically thin. I had very little opportunity of talking to him, as the children insisted on retaining his attention. I noticed, however, that he had the same courtesy of manner as his brother the priest, but joined to a decisiveness of speech and observancy of look, which denoted him a doer as well as a thinker.

I know not how, unless it was by some change in look or voice when addressing her,—but somehow I felt convinced, before dinner was over, that Mario cared for Beatrice. And I wondered if it was there that the trouble lay.

The remaining members of this family group, Madame Carpacci and her husband, struck me chiefly by their extreme resemblance to each other, and difference to Mario and Padre Vincenzo. She seemed much more the sister of her husband than of her brothers ; unless, in-

deed, it were Piero, who might be described as the missing link between them, both physically and intellectually.

After dinner, great games went on with the children in the large galleried music-hall. I was not allowed to join in them, on the score of fatigue ; but sat and talked to Padre Vincenzo, near an immense open fire-place of old carved stone.

As soon as the children had been carried off to bed by their nurses, their elders joined us, and Piero almost immediately asked Beatrice to sing. I felt very sorry for her ; I knew how singing to me would recall many happy evenings at Schwalbach. But she took up her guitar at once, and sang song after song—avoiding, though, I noticed, those she used to sing at her mother's request.

She had the most charming voice, rich, and with that sort of thrill, which has nothing to do with the wearisome "tremolo" so common to Italian singers—but is best defined by the French as, "*ayant les larmes dans la voix.*"

At the request of Piero, she ended with a profoundly melancholy Apulian song, which had, I remember, for refrain the words "*sotto l'altare,*" and which with its passionate monotonous minor cadences seemed to open a vista of the woes of the whole world. It was a most unfortunate choice to have made ; and I saw Mario look at her from time to time with concern and sympathy. She sang it through, however, with perfect self-control ; and my eyes met Mario's with a look of friendly congratulation.

The momentary silence which followed was broken by Madame Carpacci, who exclaimed : "I do believe that is what the ghosts sing in the chapel ! At any rate it is quite dismal enough."

Hilda gave a semi-despairing, semi-resigned shrug of the shoulders, and a reproachful, "Oh, Laura !" as she looked from her to Beatrice.

The latter caught her look, and smiling, answered, "Dear Hilda ! but you did not think I had forgotten ?"

"I hoped so ! but Piero and Laura are impossible !"

"Why, what have we done ?" asked Madame Carpacci in all innocence.

"Raised the ghost question ; and just to-night too !"

Laura clasped her hands dramatically. "What a head ! I utterly forgot that you didn't want Beatrice to think of them."

"But Beatrice was thinking of them," the girl interrupted her. And I, impatient to understand the meaning of it all, inquired :

"What 'them' ? Please tell me why are you all so incomprehensibly mysterious ?"

Piero, his sister, and her husband, in truly Italian fashion, answered in chorus—

Mme. C.—"The ghosts in our empty chapel——"

M. C.—"They come on the eve of all the great festas."

Piero.—"Several people swear they have seen them."

Mme. C.—"I myself have *heard* them, from my room."

M. C.—"And so did Hilda's sailor cousin."

Piero.—"Yes, but he said it sounded like the 'Marseillaise'!"

Mme. C.—"That was because he was '*incredule*.'"

And she paused, out of breath—while I noticed that Mario looked grave, and Beatrice troubled, and Hilda said to me *sotto voce*: "My dear, can't you turn the conversation?"

But before I had time to utter a word, Madame Carpacci called out to Padre Vincenzo, who, during Beatrice's singing, had retired to the other side of the room, and remained apparently immersed in some book: "Vincenzo, *you* have heard the ghosts sing in the chapel, haven't you?"

He rose, and came towards us, holding his book behind him; a kindly smile about his mouth. Mario walked across to the piano, and began turning over music. He evidently wished to keep out of the conversation. And Hilda whispered explanatorily: "We are in for a discussion of the supernatural, and as we are a mixture of 'blacks' and 'whites,' the subject is as dangerous as Home Rule would be where there were Tories and Radicals."

The priest paused a moment, then said very quietly, "Yes, I heard chanting last Easter Eve, and it seemed to come from the empty chapel. But," he continued very slowly and thoughtfully, "I always feel that the perception of supernatural sounds or sights is mental; not of the senses—mind only is fine enough to be conscious of spirit—matter cannot come in touch with it."

"Mind' here standing for imagination, eh?" suggested Piero.

"No," the priest answered gravely; "not imagination, but perception. Mind both conceives and perceives; here it perceives."

"Well, anyhow *you* believe in our chapel ghosts," Madame Carpacci said with a sigh of comfort. "But now I want to know if you believe what that old French governess of ours tells me—I went to see her this afternoon, and she told me more extraordinary things than ever." Then turning politely to me, she explained: "This lady lost her daughter five years ago, a quite young girl; but she believes she has visits from her spirit constantly, although she never *sees* her; but she knows when she is there, and she tells her everything she wants to learn. She only has to take a pencil in her hand, and all the answers come to her."

"What, even the winning numbers in the Lottery?" came from Mario, in a tone of good-humoured raillery, as he left the piano and took the chair beside mine. "How extremely convenient!"

His sister laughed. "How stupid of me, I never thought of asking her that. But, Mario, she, poor thing, is most serious about it; and the things she tells me are most serious too; all about the other worlds, planets, and so on, where her daughter says people go to when they die."

Mario laughed incredulously.

"Some are for good, and some for bad! spirits, I *think* she said,

but I remember that every one's penance is to come back here, and to haunt the places where they had most sinned, until they expiated them."

"That's not a bad idea," said Piero. "I wonder what place you will haunt, Laura?"

"Her Parisian dressmaker's establishment," her husband replied promptly.

"And lucky you if you haunt nothing worse than your tailor's!" laughed Hilda.

"But in that case," interposed Mario, "you and Laura will be—how can one say it?—divided, for your tailor lives in London. Is it part of the penance, do you think, the dooming of husbands and wives to perpetual separation?"

"It depends," suggested Hilda maliciously, "on how they got on with one another. It might be the greater penance to be together. In fact, now that I think of it, I seem to see the planets full of the ghosts of married people (especially Italians!) in perpetual contiguity!"

"Which terrible vision," continued Mario, in the same tone, "leaves us with the problem, how can they both carry out their doom of haunting each the scenes of his or her worst earthly iniquities (which can very rarely be one and the same), and that of tormenting each other by being for ever together? You must ask your friend for more precise information, Laura."

I fancied Beatrice looked pained at the somewhat flippantly sarcastic turn conversation had taken; but Madame Carpacci took it all *au grand sérieux*, and answered:

"I'll try and remember to ask her, but I always forget most of what she tells me—or don't understand it. I do remember one other thing though, because it was so very dreadful. She actually said her daughter had told her that Pope Pius IX. had to haunt the Vatican, because hypocrisy had been his worst sin in pretending to be kept prisoner there, when he might have come out whenever he liked."

Complete silence greeted this astoundingly inappropriate anecdote. Then Hilda caught her breath, saying almost inaudibly, "I knew she would put her foot in it," as she looked across me at Mario, with an imploring elevation of the eyebrows. He repressed his smile of amusement, and nodded assurance of silence, whilst Beatrice kept her eyes fixed on Padre Vincenzo, who, by the slightest flicker about the lips showed that he too had the passing thought 'save us from fools.' But a moment after he said with his usual gentle courtesy:

"My dear Laura, I think you had better tell your friend to take care lest she have to haunt all the places in which she has attended to other people's affairs instead of her own. I fear it might be rather a lengthy penance."

I did not hear if Madame Carpacci promised to do this also, for Hilda rose, and saying I must be tired out, sent Mario for candles,

and after cordial good-nights and wishes for good repose, she and Beatrice accompanied me to my room.

As we stood over the fire, Hilda gave a sigh and exclaimed, "If you knew what it was to have to steer clear of shoals with all these differently thinking people!"

"But they were all very nice and good-tempered about it; and it really was most amusing," I answered.

"Yes, to-night; but it isn't always so. Sometimes they get excited, and say more than they mean, and just now I especially regret such discussions," she added meaningly, as she put her arm on Beatrice's shoulder, and kissed her.

"Will you tell Eleanor why, dear?" she continued. "I want you to talk to her, for you are kindred spirits, and understand each other."

Beatrice smiled at me, but sighed as she answered, "Yes, I want to talk to Eleanor; but not to-night; she is far too tired."

"Indeed she is not," I replied; "neither too tired, nor too sleepy. And anyhow I should not go to bed to-night till after twelve o'clock. So if you will stay and talk to me, dear, you will give me a great pleasure."

"I may, then, Hilda? And at twelve, you know, I am going to the chapel."

"Dearest, let me beg you not. You know it will be bad for you. Please—please give up the idea."

"But, indeed, it won't be bad for me at all. Besides, I must go, I can't help it. *C'est plus fort que moi!*"

Hilda continued to implore her to alter her intention, but in vain. She was quietly determined, and at length Hilda gave in, partially reassured by my offer of accompanying her being accepted.

"You are very tiresome people," she ejaculated, as she took up her candle and bid us good-night. "I shall have Beatrice in bed with a nervous attack to-morrow, and Eleanor with a collapse from exhaustion. So a nice cheerful Christmas you are preparing us."

As soon as she had gone I threw myself into a low chair by the fire, and Beatrice knelt before it, meditatively blowing its cheerful flames into further brightness.

"Padre Vincenzo is coming, too," she said presently. "He has given up attending the midnight mass on purpose. He is good beyond words."

"But won't you tell me now, dear, what it is that troubles you?" I asked her gently.

She passed her hand over her brow, pushing up the wave of soft hair, which fell naturally back again; then, sitting on the rug and leaning against my knees, she looked steadily into the fire, and said, very slowly:

"I will try and tell you; and then, if you can, you will help me, won't you? I am very unhappy just now because Mario——" she

paused, and I, leaning forward, rested my lips on her hair, and finished the sentence for her, "Mario cares for you. Yes, dear, I know that much; I saw it."

"And I care for him," she continued, with that thrill in her voice, "with all my heart, with every fibre of my being."

"Dearest, but that is good."

She gave a deep long sigh, and for a few moments there was silence, save the crackling of the firewood, and the little murmur of the flames.

"I will try and tell you," she resumed presently, "but it isn't easy. He is good—oh, so noble and so great, so far above most of us, but he is honestly and avowedly an unbeliever in religion, and I do not know if I may dare trust myself to marry him. Can you understand? I fear I am weak, Eleanor, but if I care for any one, I cannot help seeing their point of view, and though it does not alter my own, yet it is always there as a barrier. And, oh, my dear, it is terrible to have to be, even in the least, on the defensive with one you love."

"My poor child, I do know. I understand. But you would not let him go, would you, because of this? Don't you think that would be the worst possible thing for him? It would make him feel you were afraid of losing your belief, and then he would think it could not be a thing much worth having. Don't you think the best way would be to trust God—and your love?"

"For myself yes, a thousand times yes! But I am not clever, or good, and if I should harm him, make him think even less well of religion because of my failures and faults?"

"Dearest, don't you think here too you had better trust? Keep close, obey, and you will be able to shine. And so he will see that what you believe 'makes for good.'"

She laid her cheek against my hands.

"You are right; I am sure you are right. But it will be very, very difficult."

"I know it, oh, so well! Things always are so difficult and puzzling in the detail, though clear in the abstract. But all great decisions must be guided by the latter, must they not?"

"If only," she continued, unheeding me, "if only he could believe what Padre Vincenzo said to-night: that our minds—though perhaps not his as yet," she said with infinite tenderness of tone, "but our minds can perceive, can feel and know things of which the senses are for ever unconscious. I have seen a glimmer of questioning pass over his face at times when Padre Vincenzo has said or done something very 'other-worldly:' as if he were thinking, 'May he not have some power after all, which is above and beyond what I know of?' But the others are so trying—you saw to-night. Is it not sad how difficult some quite good believers make belief for others?"

We continued talking for some time, I saying all I could to en-

courage her to trust and to hope, when my eyes fell on the clock, and seeing it was half-past eleven, I asked if we should not go to the chapel. She assented, and as she wrapped my cloak around me, laid her face caressingly against mine, and thanked me with such sweetness for "the help and comfort I had given."

We passed along the corridor outside, and entered a sitting-room whose window opened on to a terrace. It lay white in the moonlight, and a great stillness reigned as we walked across it to a door which opened into the gallery of the chapel. There were stools by the railing, and we knelt and prayed.

Presently I looked over into the space below. At first I could distinguish nothing in the darkness, but gradually my eyes grew accustomed to it, and I made out rows of empty seats, and a deserted altar, with a kneeling figure before it, which I guessed was Padre Vincenzo's.

What silence! one seemed to hear one's own heart-beats. I looked at Beatrice. She knelt with her elbows on the railings, her chin resting on her clasped hands; her lips were slightly parted, and her eyes gazing intently before her.

The silence became oppressive: I covered my face with my hands as I knelt, and tried to concentrate my thoughts. A movement of my companion made me raise my head. *The chapel was full of people!* I had heard nothing: no one had come in: but they were there; rows and rows of kneeling forms, with bowed heads, or upturned faces; clasped or outstretched hands, men, women, old and young, rich and poor. I saw them distinctly, how I know not, there seemed no need of light; they were there; one seemed to feel as well as see them.

And then arose the sound of voices, and a shiver struck through me from head to foot. I could catch no words, they always evaded me; but the tones of the voices were more expressive than any words; it is impossible to describe the depths of sorrow, repentance, entreaty they revealed.

A feeling of positive pain came over me, of profoundest compassion. Beatrice felt it too; I heard her breathe, "Oh, poor souls, poor souls, what can we do for you? Can we not expiate? Ah, let me expiate, and give them rest; oh, give them rest!"

And still the voices continued. I heard a movement behind me, and turning, saw Mario standing, his gaze intently fixed on Beatrice. He had evidently heard her prayer. He was pale, his lips set. Beatrice, unconscious of his presence, remained kneeling, stretched half over the railing. Mario came the other side of me.

"Look," I whispered; "you see them?" pointing below.

"I see my brother Vincenzo," he answered in the same tone.

"What, nothing else? Look again! and listen. It *can't* be that you see nothing, hear nothing?"

He shook his head. "Absolutely nothing!" he answered, and I saw that it was true.

I tried again, however, seeing and hearing so distinctly myself. "But those voices, so soul-piercing, how is it you only cannot hear them?" But he paid no further attention; he was looking at Beatrice, and I knew that would be best for him. Who loves understands, and he would not fail to read the truth in her face.

I leant forward therefore, just as Padre Vincenzo rose from his knees, and turned towards the people.

Their voices sank into silence, as the words of the absolution, in low, distinct, vibrating tones fell from his lips:

"Misereatur vestri omnipotens Deus, et dimissis peccatis vestris, perducatur vos ad vitam æternam. Amen."

A sigh waved through the chapel, and Padre Vincenzo, again raising his voice, gave the benediction: "Benedicat vos omnipotens Deus, Pater, et Filius, et Spiritus Sanctus."

An "Amen," sounding like what one would imagine as "the last chord only to be heard in Heaven," swept over the chapel, and it was again empty; saving Padre Vincenzo, who was kneeling once more before the altar.

I looked at Beatrice; she had buried her face in her hands, and I felt she was crying. Tears too were on my cheeks. Somehow gratitude has more power for loosening them than sorrow.

I heard Mario go quietly out. We remained some time longer, the bells of the little village churches ringing out their message of good tidings: "Peace on earth—goodwill—goodwill."

At last I turned and whispered, "Shall we not go?" Beatrice rose, then stood a moment, a look of immense gladness shining through her tears. We left Padre Vincenzo kneeling there.

Beatrice followed me across the terrace. Her hands still clasped before her; her eyes still looking into the beyond. Within the sitting-room was Mario; he came straight to her. I think he hardly realized I was present: at any rate he did not mind me.

She held out her hands to him. "Mario, we have seen them; you will believe it, will you not? And Padre Vincenzo has blessed them, and I trust they are at rest." She still had that look of gladness on her lips; of seeing behind and beyond in her eyes.

"My heart," he exclaimed passionately, holding her hands in his, gazing straight into her eyes, "I cannot lie, and I saw nothing: nothing but you! But that was enough for me! I am convinced, utterly and entirely, that you—yes, all three of you—saw and heard what I could neither see nor hear. For me there was nothing; but something there was of whose presence you all were conscious; and I think that some day the light will come to me also. Will not that suffice you, my own? Will you not now trust yourself to me?"

She simply held up her lips for answer, and I turned and left them, as the bells rang again out: "Goodwill—goodwill—and peace to all men."

E. VERE,

JUSQU'AU REVOIR.

BY CHARLES W. Wood, F.R.G.S., AUTHOR OF "THROUGH HOLLAND,"
"LETTERS FROM MAJORCA," ETC., ETC.



STEALING A GLANCE AT THE WORLD.

THE time was drawing near for Osman's departure and we thought of it with keen regret. He had prolonged his stay into weeks, and those hours and days had been some of the pleasantest in our remembrance. For once the malignant crossness of events had been stayed in our favour ; Fate was kindly in throwing us together ; accidentally as it appeared : only that with James Beauchamp one feels inclined to say that nothing happens by chance or accident. The almost daily events of life seem to contradict this theory ; but we who cannot see beyond the veil ; cannot see the end from the beginning of any

single chapter of existence ; may well assume that the apparent chances of life are all designed incidents, bearing upon a given purpose and termination : each event the separate sections of a puzzle one day to become a perfect whole. If Nature worked by violent means, the machinery of the world would soon be out of joint. There is no jarring in the wheels which keep the universe on its way. The turning of a straw appears very often to influence the whole life for good or ill ; and we know that no single life is regulated by mere straws. Nothing is truer than that Providence works by small means to great ends.

"I am recalled and I must go. My presence in Constantinople has become a necessity," said Osman. "I lament my departure. Never has Cairo so charmed me ; never have days passed so swiftly. My only consolation is that what has been may be again. You will

come to me in Constantinople ; and, indeed, in what spot of this fair globe might we not meet, when I shake myself free of diplomacy and am able to roam at will ?”

Our time for departure was also drawing near. Another week, and we should have turned from Cairo and all its wonders with infinite sorrow : though far less than if Osman had remained. He had still three days before him ; we six.

“I wish we could have travelled together,” he said. “Nay, you might even have accompanied me as far as Constantinople, and continued your way through Austria. One week with me, and you should have been as much at home as I myself.”

This also was impossible. H.’s leave of absence was drawing to an end ; in forming our plans we had allowed only sufficient time for the homeward journey.

“That shall be our last recollection of Cairo !” cried Osman. “We will have a day in the desert, with nothing but the solitude and breadth and repose of nature around us. I will arrange it all, and it shall be to-morrow. Be with me at nine o’clock and our horses and attendants shall be ready. We will go to the Petrified Forest, and pass into the Valley of Wanderings ; and take our luncheon at Moses’ well, in the shelter and shadow of that great amphitheatre of rocks which seems to match so well those desert solitudes. Bring nothing with you but yourselves : the attendants shall carry our nectar and ambrosia.”

We had been spending the evening together ; an arrangement which had become a recognised law five days out of the seven. It was drawing towards the hour of separation ; and a remark of H.’s about the Petrified Forest : as to which species the fossil remains belonged, and comparing the sandstone of the Mokattam hills with the meiocene of Farafra with its bubbling springs : had caused Osman suddenly to exclaim that we would go and see these things for ourselves.

A day in the desert, with Osman as guide, philosopher and friend, seemed the perfection of human enjoyment ; and the matter was no sooner proposed than arranged.

The next morning was bright and clear as usual, the skies were blue, the air was sparkling : everything was favourable to our enterprise. Punctually at nine o’clock we found ourselves with Osman. The horses in the courtyard—small, thoroughbred Arabians of the greatest beauty—awaited our arrival, impatiently pawing the stone pavement. In a very few moments we had started, three attendants on horseback following.

We went quickly up the Mouskee, and turning sharply to the left, passed out of Cairo by the Bab en-Nasr : the “Gate of the Help of God,” near the great Mohammedan cemetery. The ancient city wall, running westward, formerly connected this gate with the Bab el-Futûh, or Gate of Victory ; and both gates were

constructed upon the lines of an old Roman castle, built on the ruins of Fostât by Cambyzes, in the sixth century B.C., when New Babylon was founded where Old Cairo now stands; afterwards, it may be remembered, the head-quarters of one of the three Roman legions stationed in Egypt when that people occupied the Lotus-Land.

It has been well said that every footstep in Cairo awakens some historical fact or record of more than ordinary interest.

We turned to the right, skirting the wonderful tombs of the Caliphs, and passing under the very shadow of the Tomb-Mosque of Barkook. To our left rose the remarkable Gebel el-Ahmar or Red Mountain, its inexhaustible quarries supplying building material from the earliest ages; and from which the two musical statues of Thebes are said to have been taken. Here, too, many fossils have been found. The romance of the spot has been broken by a railway, which carries away to the world the products of the quarries. Further to the right rose the Mokattam range. We looked back upon the minarets of the Tombs of the Caliphs and our thoughts naturally took the same direction, without any touch of mesmerism.

"Do you remember that night, and our wonderful moonlight experience?" said Osman. "Had you ever met with anything like it before—or since?"

It was a difficult question. Our moonlight visions at the Great Pyramid had not possessed the intricate details, the refined delicacy of these Tombs of the Caliphs; but for grandeur, simple majesty of outline, silence and solitude, everything that appeals to the heart of man, perhaps nothing on earth could equal those Royal Tombs of Gizeh.

We were now passing into another matchless but very different solitude: the outskirts of the mighty Sahara, with all its untold possibilities. Before us lay a wide, pathless world; an ocean of desert country; sandy plains stretching to right and left. It happened that we were alone. Of the numberless inhabitants of Cairo, none had chosen that day for visiting the Petrified Forest; or it might be that we were too early for them. All the charms of the wilderness took possession of us. We might have been starting on a long journey to Mount Sinai, where the tables of the Law were delivered to Moses, and Elijah found refuge after the priests of Baal had been slain at the brook Kishon. Such a journey could not be done under a fortnight; or even more if much time was spent at the Monastery of St. Catherine. Here in the early days the Christians settled, far from the world and mankind; monks and recluses in good earnest, existing amidst these rocky mountains, whose hidden springs of water quenched their thirst; locusts and wild-honey and an almost barren vegetation scarcely satisfying hunger. They might well suppose that here they would be left in peace to worship in their own way, and escape persecution. But even here fanaticism found them out, and we read of raids, massacres and abominable cruelties.



A YOUNG CAIRENE.

Beasts of prey will spare each other, but man is less merciful to man.

"It would be a charming excursion," said Osman. "I took it many years ago with my father, and the impression is as vividly with me to-day as then. I can conceive how you would enjoy it—how thoroughly we should enjoy it together."

The Convent of St. Catherine, he added, existed under the very shadow of the Mount of Moses. The visitor passed out by the garden of the institution, and by a well-indicated path commenced the ascent of this chain of rocky mountains. Various excursions led to ruined monasteries, to small oases where water fresh and clear is for ever found; to a chapel dedicated to Elijah and Elisha; to the small cave 500 feet above the monastery, in which Elijah is said to have lived until all danger to his life was over: as described in the First Book of Kings.

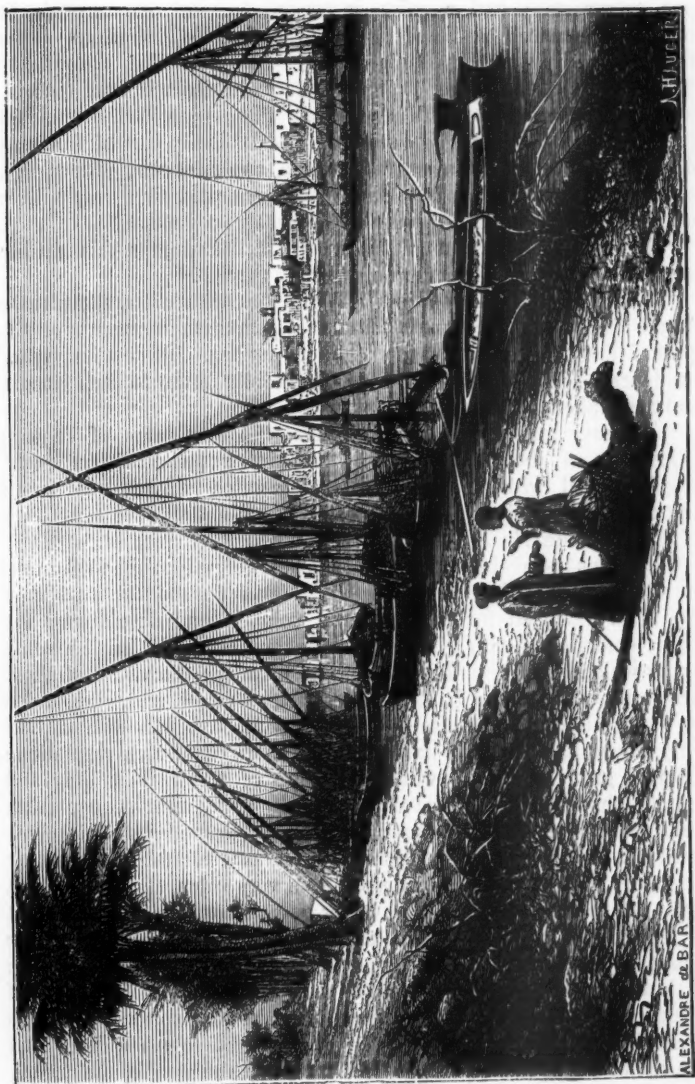
"Almost as poorly fed as Elijah then was are the monks of the monastery to-day," said Osman. "It is an irregular, straggling pile of buildings, 5000 feet above the sea, strongly protected by massive walls. There are rooms set apart for pilgrims and visitors, who may stay here, as long as they care to do so, contributing a small sum towards their humble fare; very humble if they bring no supplies with them. A long wooden gallery opens to these rooms, which are close to the cells of the monks. Here they breathe air that is worth a king's ransom and keeps life in them to a far old age, in spite of fasts and privations."

"Are they as strict in their observances as other monastic orders?" H. asked.

"Much more so," replied Osman, "considering how few are their temptations to frivolity and dissipation, the thousand-and-one small sins and errors that earnest men and women, bravely fighting life's battle in the world, meet with every day and overcome. They take neither meat nor wine. Meat indeed would be an impossible luxury in the centre of the great desert. Oil is forbidden during their fasts, which occur frequently. Fish is permitted; and also a liqueur made from dates—the latter in small quantities. Perhaps that is wise—for it is very good. They assemble for prayer four times in the twenty-four hours, twice during the silent watches of the night. Long slumbers and self-indulgence are not for them. Once women were not admitted within the monastery walls, but that rule has been abolished: a happy thing for lady travellers who venture so far: the next shelter is a very long ride from St. Catherine's."

"Is it anything of an oasis?" we asked. "Do trees and flowers and fruits flourish there?"

"Indeed yes," returned Osman, "and in great abundance. Within the walls surrounding the monastery cypress and other trees are found, whilst flowers and evergreens do their best to turn this barren spot into a wilderness that blossoms as the rose. Vines



ON THE NILE.

and apricots grow upon the sunny walls, and bear good fruit. The monastery is a curious building. Narrow irregular passages meet one everywhere; and a guide is needed to pilot one through the numberless courts enclosed within the walls. Everything bears the mark of antiquity. All might almost have existed in the time of Moses; and near at hand is the well at which Moses is said to have watered the flocks of Jethro's daughters. The garden itself is enclosed in high walls and marked out in terraces. Every sort of fruit tree flourishes: magnificent almonds, apricots, apples, pears, plums, figs, olives: what you will. The climate is so splendid that only a little water is needed to make the earth abundantly productive."

"I think I will turn monk," laughed H., "and join this earthly paradise. May the monks eat of their own fruits?"

"Yes; each has his portion. Vegetables are scarcer, though one would think more necessary. But things flourish better above the ground than in the ground or upon its surface. After a few years' residence on Mount Sinai some of the monks return to their homes, and are ranked as martyrs."

"An easy martyrdom," laughed H. "A few years of repose; enjoyment of the best fruits of the earth; penances no doubt largely mixed with indulgences; a sea-watch division of time; and then canonisation. I think we will go on and try the experience of St. Catherine's."

Not for us to-day this experience; no pilgrimage into the wilderness, for which we longed earnestly as we had ever desired the voyage of the Nile. Longed for the wonderful solitude and desolation; the lonely communing with Nature; all the grandeur of these immense plains which seem boundless almost as eternity: the vision of those wonderful oases, where hidden springs for ever flow, and, surrounded by an ocean of sand, white and dazzling, the eye falls with a relief only known to those who have experienced it, upon rich vegetation: emerald green plains on which palm groves throw their long and grateful shadows. Some are surrounded by rocky undulations, which help to fertilise these cultivated spots, and sometimes hide them until the traveller is close upon them, so that almost in a moment he passes from the depths of despair to a very Eden of delight. But these are the small oases. The larger oases stretch over a great tract of desert. In many of them, the Dead Sea fruit grows on trees about six feet high. But crops good for food are also found here: such as rice, wheat and barley; the date-palm in abundance, and of a superior sort; olive and other fruit trees: besides cotton and indigo in smaller quantities. Thus these rare spots are oases indeed. Of the animals that roam there are few excepting the gazelle, the jackal, and the fox.

Our journey to-day would be limited to the Petrified Forest and its surroundings; but even this would give us a foretaste of what the more remote plains of the desert yield to the traveller: delights

which Osman had frequently experienced and described with all the magic of his eloquence.

The river divides the deserts; the Arabian from the Nubian. Here ages ago passed out a great multitude in the dead of night, after spoiling the Egyptians. Here the children of Israel began their forty years' wandering under Moses; waxing impatient and idolatrous; gathering manna day by day; their wants miraculously supplied; delivered out of the hand of generations of oppressors; with every reason for rejoicing; yet constantly thrown back by discontent and unrighteousness.

Away we galloped this morning, perhaps in the very track of the Israelites of old; Cairo and its civilisation soon left behind us. Our very horses seemed to rejoice in the freedom of the desert, and scoured the plains as if distant Sinai had been the end of their ambition. Before long we were surrounded by the vast stretches and undulations of the wilderness. Very far off, we still saw the Citadel of Cairo and the Mosque of Mohammed Ali rising heavenwards; vague as a dream; a dim foundationless outline that would presently dissolve and disappear.

Onwards yet, until nothing but long reaches of tableland met the view; low sand-hills, waves upon waves of arid plains, a rocky stratum of limestone witnessing to the barren earth. Far away in the interior, we come to rich ranges of mountains stretching westward, broadening as they advance, until they reach the Nile at Assooan. These mountains, rising to a height of 6000 feet above the sea, are rich in granite, porphyry, serpentine marble, and other products, including alabaster and gypsum. In the Arabian desert, too, you light upon ravines and precipices, which might be made productive, if not so far out of the world.

And some of these oases are largely inhabited. The Great Oasis of El-Khargeh, for instance, has a population of over 6000. Its other name, Menamoon, signifies "the abode of Amen." Herodotus probably refers to it when writing of "a city seven days' journey from Thebes, called by the Greeks the Island of the Blessed."

Here the army of Cambyses halted on its way to the Oasis of Ammon, and perished in the desert.

The smaller oases used El-Khargeh as a city of refuge; and here Nestorius was banished after he had been condemned by the Council of Ephesus, in the year 435, dying in exile. It is the largest but not the most fertile of the oases: immense tracts of cultivation with wide stretches of barren sand between, extending in all for about ninety miles from north to south, and about twelve miles east to west.

"A hundred and fifty springs are said to water these fertile plains," said Osman, "specially rich in the date palm, whose trees exist in tens of thousands. In their season many of the caravans you meet are laden with the fruit of the oases which finds a ready sale in all Eastern towns, whose inhabitants look upon dates as their daily

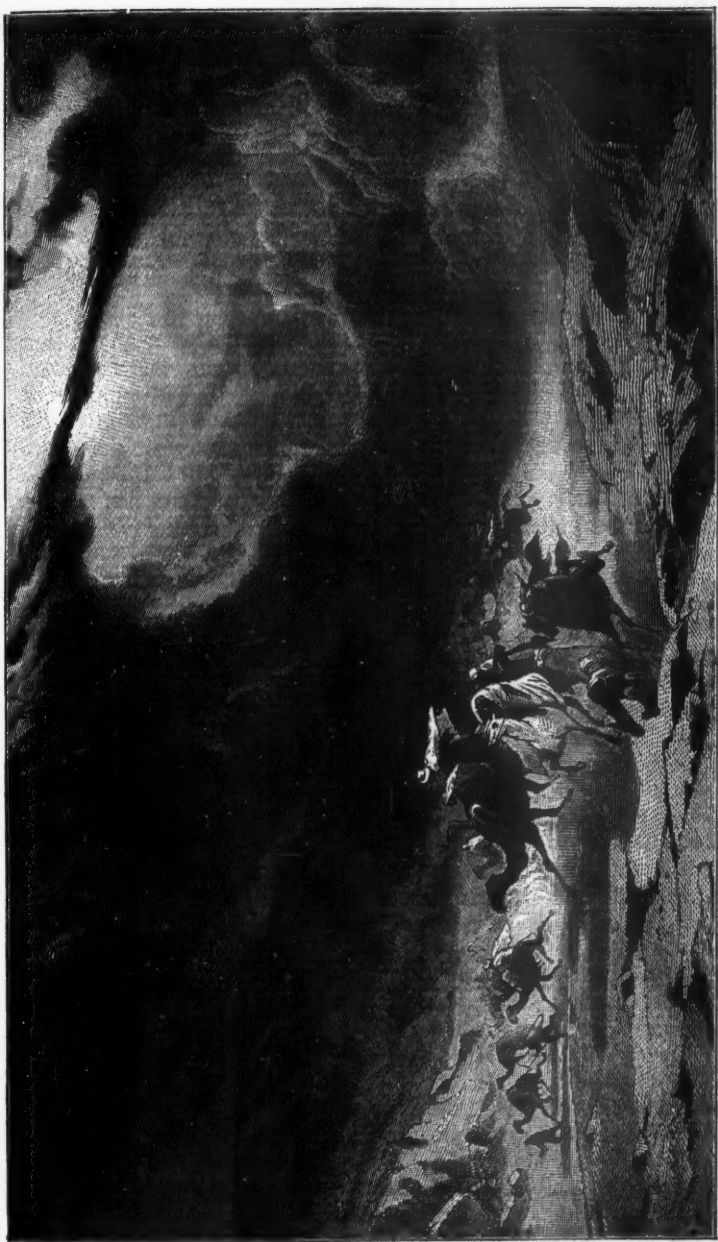
bread. What more picturesque or poetical way of earning one's livelihood, than by cultivating the fruits of the earth? At night these wandering merchants repose under tents, rising before the sun, and resting again during the extreme heat of the day. How many a time have I not done the same!"

"But after all," H. observed, "the caravans you meet, the Arab encampments, are the exception, not the rule. The condition of the desert is silence, solitude, and desolation: a world waiting for its people. Is it not so?"

"It is," replied Osman; "owing to the vastness of the wilderness; for more people inhabit it than one might imagine. The history of Africa lies in the future. In the western Sahara, you will meet the fearless Arabs on their thoroughbred horses, now rushing like the very wind itself before an advancing sandstorm; now quietly pursuing their way to some distant town or to the banks of the Nile; now reposing day after day in tents in the midst of the desert; a small colony whose precise object for haunting that spot no one knows and no one ventures to inquire. At times they are open and frank enough, will give you shelter and take salt with you; at others, when they have secret and inscrutable plans in operation, they will be dumb as an oracle, silent as the grave. Their horses are their confidants, even as they possess their hearts; and, faithful creatures that they are—and beautiful as faithful—they never betray their masters."

A foretaste of this wild and charming life was ours to-day. Never before had we experienced or realised this desert solitude; as lost to the world as if days instead of hours had seen us travelling through the pathless wilderness. A wild freedom possessed our senses; the chains of life seemed to fall away; new and untold possibilities were on the eve of dawning; body and spirit were being gifted with wings, and we should control the air. Absolute calmness and repose surrounded us like an atmosphere. The lesser troubles of life here had no place. A lightness of heart fell upon us such as we had never enjoyed in our happiest moments. It seemed possible to embrace the whole world of delight, thought and sensation, in one glance of the eye, one outstretching of the arms. Heart beat and pulses quickened as the horses galloped madly over hill and plain, and, for all one could see, might gallop for ever. This was life indeed, and one longed for a succession of days and nights in these wild and boundless solitudes.

We passed through sandy wastes, hot and glistening in the sunshine. Never was sky so blue and brilliant, so ethereal and celestial, as the sky above us. This alone must have made one intensely happy. We could almost see the sparkling air with its wonderful luminous bloom as we neared the beautiful Mokattam range. A yellowish hill stood at the mouth of a narrow winding valley or gorge, and over a broken path of loose stones we ascended for more than a mile to where the rocky pass opened out in a bold



FLYING FROM A SAND-STORM IN THE DESERT.

and imposing amphitheatre. Here flourished a strange and solitary fig-tree enclosed in a wall built as a shelter from the wind by the quarrymen who once worked here. And here we found Moses' spring or well, as it is called : a small rivulet of water flowing from a cleft in the rock. It is more than probable that the spring did not exist in the days of Moses, but was brought to life by the labours of the quarrymen. The water was bitter as the waters of Marah, and even our horses would have none of it. But the water varies, and there are times when its brackishness disappears for a season. The gorge was full of fossils and desert plants.

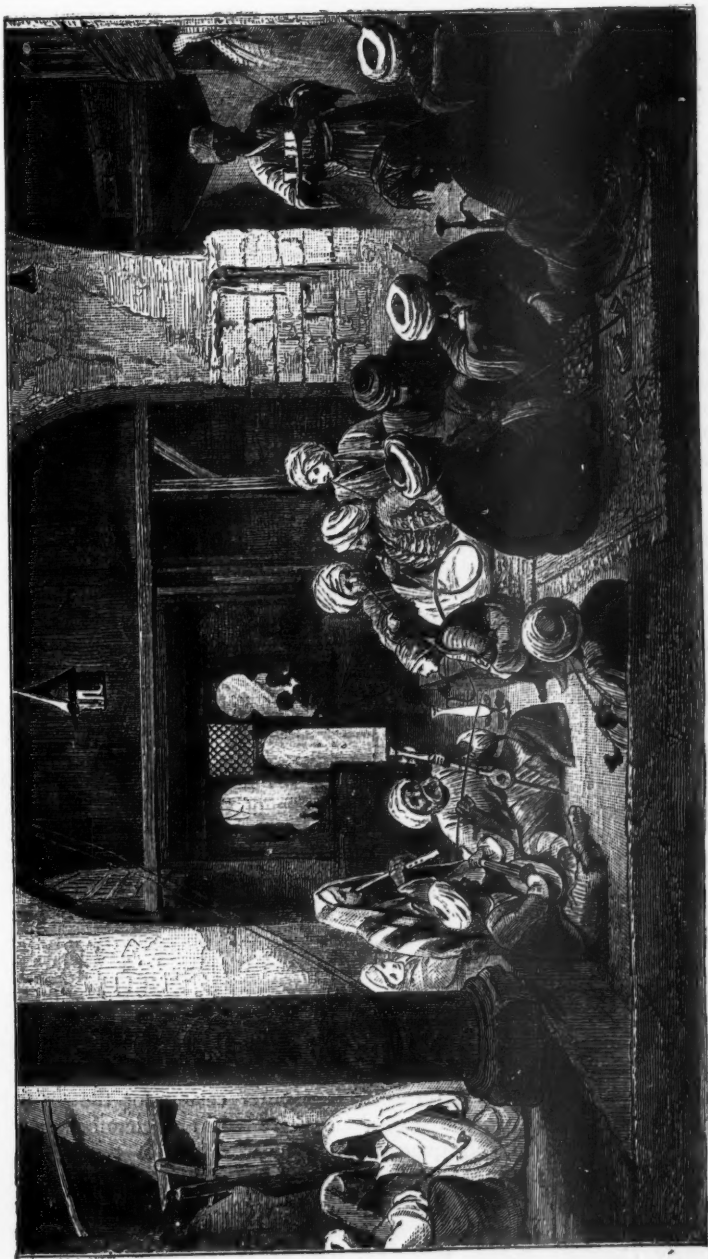
Here we halted, and Osman consulted his watch.

"It is yet early," he said. "If you are equal to it, we might push on to the Great Petrified Forest, for rest and luncheon. Our horses are swift, and the exhilaration of flying over these sandy wastes forbids all sense of fatigue. We shall reach the so-called forest in an hour and a half, or less. Even then it will scarcely be noon ; we shall have two good hours for rest and roaming ; and you will become a little more acquainted with these desert solitudes. Let us first take a glance at the lesser Petrified Forest, so that you may know what to expect from the greater."

Passing down the gorge to the yellow hill, we turned to the right and continued our way to the foot of the range, presently reaching a black, glazed-looking rock, with lower hills opposite where Osman pointed out some curious oyster-fossils. Fossils, indeed, seem to be the condition of these regions, which ought to be the delight of antiquarians and geologists. Immediately beyond these hills was the Petrified Forest.

At the first moment we felt rather bewildered. We had heard of the wood that could not be seen for the trees, but here we found neither wood nor trees. If we had thought much about the matter, it was to expect a forest, more or less extensive, of trees standing and turned to stone by the flight of time, the action of the atmosphere and other causes : antiquities from the hand of Nature as wonderful and well-preserved as antiquities from the hand of man in the Boulak Museum. Happily, the desert itself with all its charms, the emotions it aroused, was a thousand times sufficient recompense for our day's excursion ; but those to whom these wild and vast solitudes do not appeal, will scarcely find the Petrified Forest any reward for their trouble.

Yet they are considered one of the wonders of Egypt, these remains which strew the sand in the neighbourhood of the Mokattam hills. Black fragments of wood turned to stone were lying about : fragments fast disappearing under the hand of tourists and fossil-collectors. All seem to belong to one species of tree, allied to the cotton plant or balsam, but of a gigantic size unknown in the present day. The whole question is involved in mystery. It is doubtful whether in remote ages the trees grew here, or whether they were floated up by



EGYPTIAN COFFEE HOUSE.

water. If the former, then this part of the desert must have changed very much in character in the course of time : the rolling away of century on century. As records of a long past age, these fossils were interesting, but they were mere petrified fragments, not a forest.

"You are surprised," said Osman. "You expected much more than you find. In fact you find nothing. Nothing but a few black pieces of wood turned to stone, which, as they do not grow like mushrooms, will very soon disappear. And these remnants of what must once have been a forest, here or elsewhere, are only interesting as fossils. In other parts of the great desert such remains are also found—are even embedded in the sandstone rock, proving that thousands of years ago Nature was passing through a state of transition resulting in what we now see. Huge trunks strew the Little Kashab for many miles. As the rock crumbled away in the course of ages, the roots, loosened and detached, scattered themselves over the surface of the plains. The fossils around us have very much the appearance of coal. Every one who comes here carries away a specimen, and the forest will soon become a tradition."

There was little need to linger. The fossils were certainly curious as specimens of the hardening effect of time upon a substance originally soft : as witness to the march of time itself : but there it ended : and not to "censure others by the dignity of excelling," we put small examples into our pockets as memorials of our visit. Then we turned to what was infinitely more full of charm : the great plains of the desert. A short gallop across the plateau brought us to the southern slopes of the Mokattam hills, where by means of a narrow path we turned into the "Valley of Wanderings." The view was magnificent, almost painful from its very length and breadth.

"There in the far distance you see rising the hills of Tura with their vast quarries, lying on the very edge of the sea," said Osman. "Long ago I inspected them all : subterranean caverns, chambers and passages, which have existed for thousands of years, for they were formed in the days of the Pharaohs. Nothing daunted the ancient Egyptians, who were not afraid of darkness or evil spirits. The Arabs, on the contrary, fear darkness, and will only quarry on the surface. Even from here you can see the outlines of what was once a powerful fortress. No quarries in Egypt are more interesting : the only example at all approaching them is the Red Mountain we passed on our way this morning, which is both worthy and easy of inspection. The stone from the quarries of Tura is said to have furnished the outer casing for the Great Pyramids. Even now, you may see in these halls and chambers how the ancients carved and quarried : and no workman of the present day surpasses them in accuracy and finish. I visited these quarries years ago with my father. We spent a whole week here, and day after day I used to lie on the slopes, reading, dreaming, overlooking the lovely changing waters, watching the boats as they glided by

with their white sails, taking no account of time, satisfied with the happiness of the present, giving little thought to the future. That," he added, "has been one of my rules of life : or perhaps it is part of my mental bias, and has influenced me unconsciously. I have always lived in the present, allowing the future to look to itself ; taking the full benefit of to-day without wishing for to-morrow. They who do so are wise, for they find at least twice as much in life as those who are always dating forward."

He pointed out a desert gorge between the hills ; a gorge wild, desolate and severe, bounded by lofty precipices of rock ; full of windings, communicating after many long miles with other and more remote ravines, stretching far away to Helwan, where you are once more in touch with civilisation, with streets and crowds and railways : influences which do their best to obliterate from one's memory all the charms of desert life.

"How well I remember one day in particular," continued Osman, "when I had left my father and gone up that majestic ravine without him. I wanted to be alone with all that grand severity ; had risen at four o'clock and gone out upon the heights to enjoy the sunrise. I suppose I was tired, for throwing myself down in a sheltered spot, I unconsciously fell asleep and slept for four hours. I shall never forget my father's alarm, or his joy at seeing me return : and, good father and friend that he ever was, he never gave me a word of reproach. As a rule I never left him even for an hour, when we were travelling together : we were more like brothers than father and son : and I had been absent for eight hours when I returned. I never did it again, for he was then getting old, and, as far as I was concerned, was growing a little nervous. I was as the apple of his eye, and I think that my death would have been his own."

All this time we were scouring the plains out of sight of all trace of life and habitation. Nothing seemed to tire our horses, and the faster they went the more enjoyable was the motion. No ride we had ever taken could equal this ride in the desert. As Osman had said, a sense of fatigue was impossible. When we reached the Greater Petrified Forest we felt that we could have gone on until sundown unwearied.

Osman led the way to a quiet spot under a rock, where the advancing sun afforded little shade, though that little was grateful. Here for a couple of hours we encamped, feasted on Olympian fare, talked of times past and present, scenes and adventures we had met with ; the turnings of straws which had influenced the current of our lives : all the mysterious, unseen influences which surround every one of us individually, and from which there is no escape.

The moments ran in golden sands ; all was freedom, repose and sunshine ; a new world, another state of existence. More than ever we wished for a longer spell of this enchantment ; for days spent in travelling into the interior, and nights passed under the quiet

stars: ending in a sojourn at the monastery of St. Catherine, and long interviews with the monks, during which we might learn their views of life and death, seclusion and penance: and discover how far their narrow existence advanced them towards the perfection all desire and none attain to. We would take long walks up the Mount of Moses, and inspect the ruined temples, the crumbling mosque the devotion of Mohammedans once raised here: and in visiting the haunts of those holy men of old, it might be that something of the patience of Moses and the mantle of Elijah might fall upon us.

But St. Catherine's was far off: we were not to see it; perhaps shall never see it: yet mentally we picture that small religious oasis where the rising and setting of the sun alone mark the days; and the death of an aged monk is the sole tragedy which breaks in upon the even tenour of this little fraternity, over which the sun shines, and the rain falls in its season, and the stars look down in nightly benediction.

The hour glass was turned, and too soon the golden sands ran out again: we could not stay here for ever. But in returning we took our time, and did not travel as the arrow flies. Refreshed by a long rest we spent hours in the delight of scouring sandy plains and passing over hills and undulations. During the whole time we saw no sign of living creature; not so much as a jackal, fox, or gazelle. The latter, indeed, with its graceful form and soft black eye, we wished for, but they are found more in the interior, and, in their extreme timidity, seldom venture so near the haunts of men. Once only in the distance we saw a file of camels, heavily laden, plodding towards Cairo.

"A caravan!" cried Osman: "let us meet them and inquire whence they come and whither they go."

Our horses were not long in reaching them, and we found they were merchants from Jedda, laden with mother-of-pearl, coffee, essential oils, and silken stuffs. The merchants were enveloped in long cloaks, and little was seen of their faces excepting the eyes, as a protection from the sun. Osman spoke to them in their own language, and what he said had the effect of causing an immediate halt. They uncovered their faces, made profound Eastern salutations, and placed themselves and all they possessed at his service. Handsome, stalwart men, with dark flashing eyes and patriarchal countenances. Some had grey beards, but the burden of years sat lightly upon them; they seemed as strong, as well able to bear fatigue, as those who were only entering manhood.

"You have had a long journey," remarked Osman. "I thought that there were now easier ways of transporting goods and precious stones from Jedda to Cairo and the outer world."

Then they explained that they were pilgrims as well as merchants. They had made a pilgrimage to Mecca, nearly fifty miles to



ENTRANCE GATE TO BAZAARS.

the west of Jedda, and had vowed to cross the desert on foot. Nothing, however, prevented them from making it at the same time a matter of business: and so it came to pass that they were now approaching Cairo and the end of their journey. After a short conversation they once more set out towards the great city, and we watched their slow and patient progress as they stood out in picturesque file against the sky, until the undulations of the plains hid them from view.

So it came to pass that towards the decline of the afternoon we found ourselves still in the desert, on the top of the Mokattam hills, surrounded by a wide and wonderful view. Behind us the great desert, in which we had just spent one of the pleasantest days of our lives: before us, the visible signs, almost sounds, of the great city, overshadowed by its splendid citadel and the mosque which crowned it; on the one hand the windings of the Nile, with the Great Pyramids beyond. The sun went down and we found ourselves still upon the hills, at the ruined mosque of Giyûshi. Cairo lay at our feet, bathed in splendour. Everything was tinged with the flush of sunset. The sky shot forth colours indescribably brilliant; the whole earth reflected the glory of the heavens. The majestic, slow-moving river was for the moment turned to blood-red, whilst the Great Pyramids had changed the grey tones of antiquity for the loveliest, most inappropriate colours of the blush-rose. The minarets of the Citadel Mosque seemed on fire; everything suggested the contrast of life and death; in these buildings, decay, the heritage of time; and in the sun and sky an emblem of the Resurrection and of eternal youth.

Alas, time would not stand still; for us it sped all too quickly, and before another sun had twice risen and set, we found ourselves at the railway station, bidding Osman a melancholy farewell.

"You have promised to come and stay with me," he said. "I hold a promise sacred; it must be so with you. Do not delay, for life is full of uncertainties. Here we have spent delightful days, but there I am even more at home. No door closed to the world shall be closed to you: and no wish you may have shall be unfulfilled. You will come too," he added to H. "We deal in magic, you know."

The rare magic of friendship and influence, of sympathy and a kindly nature, combined with singular mental powers, a profound knowledge of mankind; the charm of unbounded wealth and an exalted station: this magic he possessed and exercised as it has been given to few.

The last moment arrived; the train slowly moved; the station-master and a small group of attendants stood in the background. Osman's pale, powerful, yet sympathetic Greek face was framed in the open window.

"Adieu," we said, as the carriage moved slowly onwards.

"*Jusqu'au revoir*," he replied.

A few moments more, and the train was out of sight. We turned back into Cairo, whose streets for us now seemed empty and deserted.

Our own sojourn in the Lotus-Land was drawing to a close. Three



SMALL EGYPTIAN EATING-HOUSE, CAIRO.

more risings of the sun, and we too should have passed away from Cairo with all its charms and attractions.

One of our last excursions must be recorded in few words.

H. wished to visit an ostrich farm, and this, combined with a visit to the Obelisk of Heliopolis, was easily arranged. The time was

the day after Osman's departure. The splendid little Arabian horses had been placed at our disposal for the remainder of our stay : a graceful act of which we did not avail ourselves. This would probably be our last excursion, and we thought we should like to become better acquainted with the donkeys of Cairo, as inseparable from the city as its bazaars and mosques, the very Nile itself. Therefore our dragoman was commissioned to exercise his skill and choose with discretion. He alone rejoiced in the departure of Osman, which reinstated him in pomp and power. Aleck loved to command.

It was a bright, clear morning ; the skies were not in sympathy with Osman's departure, and that Cairo was so much the poorer. The air was sparkling and exhilarating ; no one could indulge in the luxury of a melancholy mood under its influence. Our donkeys were full of life and animation ; as we have said before, one soon grows used to the action of these Eastern animals ; and they are so strong and willing that there are those—we were not of the number—who prefer them to horses.

We found ourselves trotting through the streets of Cairo, charging as it were the citadel, which loomed ahead of us, crowned by its ever-memorable mosque. We passed straight up the crowded Mouskee, and Aleck went before us, clearing the way ; very much in his element. Voice and whip had no rest ; and again we trembled for consequences which never happened. Remonstrance was useless. But every now and then some ludicrous incident would occur which convinced us that with all his despotic propensities a certain love of humour in our dragoman redeemed the apparent sternness of his character. The truth was, in his small way he was a philosopher ; he knew the nature of those with whom he had to deal ; experience had taught him what he had to do and how far he had to go : the limits seemed to us beyond the bounds of discretion, but he knew better : the end always justified the means. Before the day was over we discovered that he had brought us this round-about way for the sole purpose of commanding the loiterers in the Mouskee.

As usual, it was crowded with a motley gathering of Easterns and Europeans : the latter often suffering by contrast. The entrance to the bazaars was of course impassable ; the streets were full of cries ; the money-changers at the corners seemed unusually lively and full of work. The calm Citadel looked down in dignified silence upon the scene, and its Mosque reminded the world that it was hastening to the silent land. We listened for the voice of the Muezzin, but it was not the hour of prayer : the minarets sent forth no warning. It was a relief to pass out of the noisy thoroughfares and by a long *détour* which really made us angry with our dragoman, turn into the direct road for Shoobra, Heliopolis, and the Ostrich Farm.

Down the long, straight road, through long avenues of trees, out into the open country. Crossing some rough, desert-like

fields, where the plough had been at work, and putting to flight a number of cruel-looking vultures—the first we had seen in the neighbourhood of Cairo—we reached a long, narrow embankment over which our donkeys scrambled with a certain amount of effort. Another mile of flat, loose, rugged, sandy waste, which tried the patience of our animals, and we saw rising before us, a large enclosure; a sort of straggling bungalow or wooden shanty: the whole very much like a zoological settlement in the desert.

The ostriches themselves were in a circular erection divided into sections; each section containing its complement of birds, old and young. Altogether there seemed an enormous number, but all had plenty of space for moving. Some every now and then darted off from one end of their "beat" to the other with the speed of the wind, whilst others would come and look at us through the grating with wide, startled eyes, as if they would have turned us into martyrs with the greatest pleasure. Strong and powerful are these ostriches both in the wing and the leg. Few creatures can equal them in speed, and they never tire; whilst a kick from one of them is not easily forgotten. They are stupid, as every one knows, and no one will wonder at, when he sees the small head; and they can be excessively cruel, perhaps as much from shyness and fear as from natural tendency. Very curious they looked as they stalked about, with their long legs, round, egg-shaped bodies and crane-like necks, their heads constantly in the attitude of intense listening, as if for ever on their guard against an unseen enemy. The feathers which make these birds so valuable adorn them far less than they do the fair heads they ultimately decorate. A great source of industry and a lucrative, are these ostrich farms, but few and small compared with those of South Africa, where the birds are presented with "the freedom of the country," and roam at will, yet are seldom lost. The office of the farm had a collection of eggs and feathers for sale sufficient to have supplied all the fashionable milliners of Paris and all the head-dresses for many a Queen's Drawing-room.

From this we turned back across the ploughed fields, over the embankment, and on to the high road again, where through magnificent avenues of trees, and past gardens laden with fruit trees and brilliant with flowers, we reached the village of Matariyeh, with its garden containing the Virgin's tree: a sycamore now old and covered with names, beneath which the Virgin is said to have rested with the Holy Child during the flight into Egypt. But the original tree came to an end two centuries ago, when the present tree was planted. It flourishes therefore, like the Papal See, by right of succession.

The garden, luxuriant and fertile, is well watered by a reservoir supplied by springs, the only water in the neighbourhood good for drinking. The reservoir is called the "Water of An," and is mentioned in Coptic legends of great antiquity. Here once

flourished the balsam plant from which was made the celebrated balm of Gilead given by Solomon to the Queen of Sheba. And here was first grown the cotton plant, destined to become so great an article of commerce in our Lotus-Land.

Soon after this we came to the ruins of Heliopolis, the famous "City of the Sun," that played so great a part in the religion of Ancient Egypt.

Here was the temple of Ra or Tum, a deity appearing under seventy-five different forms, each form having its own special attribute, Tum being the evening sun, Harmachis the morning sun. The place was also called An, or Benna, the House of Phoenix, identical with the Hebrew On, mentioned in the Bible.

The sun temple of Ra in fame and antiquity came next to the temple of Ptah in Memphis, and its ceremonies were even more prolonged and gorgeous than those of the temple of the Apis bull. The two temples, however, were intimately connected. The Mnevis bull of Heliopolis was sacred to Ra; and the Apis bull of Memphis, sacred to Ptah, had its abode in Heliopolis until it was transferred to Memphis. Its college of priests was more celebrated than all others, one of the priests being Potiphar, whose daughter, Asnath, Joseph married. Herodotus declares that the sages of Heliopolis were the most learned in the world.

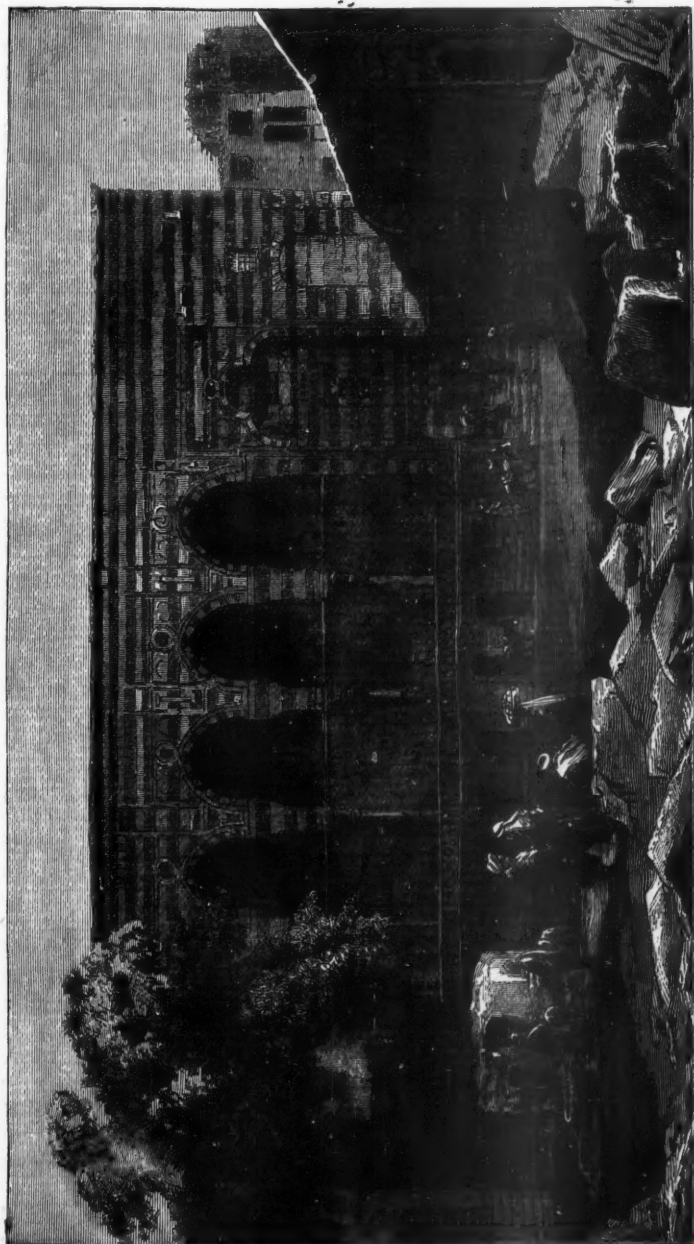
Of the ruins of this great city, these mighty temples, nothing remains excepting the obelisk; the oldest in Egypt.

This once stood, with its lost companion, in front of the entrance to the temple. Before them was a long avenue of sphinxes; and nothing more dignified and imposing, or better suited to the country in grandeur and simple outlines, can be imagined.

The obelisk was erected in the reign of Osirtasen, second king of the twelfth or Theban dynasty, some three thousand years before the Christian era. Its long inscription, written in the character of the old empire, is repeated on all four sides.

There are still remains of mounds and brick walls to be seen, so much the colour of the surrounding sand that at the first moment it is difficult to distinguish one from the other. These ruined walls marked an enclosure of some five thousand feet, supposed to have been the vast open space in front of the temple dedicated to sacred uses.

As a remnant of antiquity, this Obelisk of Heliopolis is one of the most interesting objects in the Lotus-Land, and once more when gazing upon it, we are brought into touch with all that grand past history and people of whose study there literally seems to be no end. The deeper we dive into the history of Egypt, the more profound become its truths, the more magnificent the foundations on which they built up their glorious kingdom, their complicated and beautiful, though heathen faith. Vaster than any people's that have since followed were their conceptions; their minds seemed limitless as



COURT OF A HOUSE IN CAIRO.

their great deserts, and their efforts steadfast as the course of their sacred river. The country remains and the river flows on ; but of the nation which grew and grew in power as hundreds of years rolled downwards into thousands, there remains only a record and a name.

The sun was overhead as we turned our backs upon Heliopolis ; the obelisk threw no shadow, hot and barren were the plains, the mounds and the ruined brick walls. The gardens looked cool and delightful as we passed them ; many of their walls were loaded with creepers of gorgeous bloom which trailed for long distances and fell gracefully, rivalling the hanging gardens of the Hesperides. The shady avenues were a grateful repose after the glare of the cloudless Eastern sky. We passed through the fashionable drive of Cairo, but it was still early, and the roads were deserted.

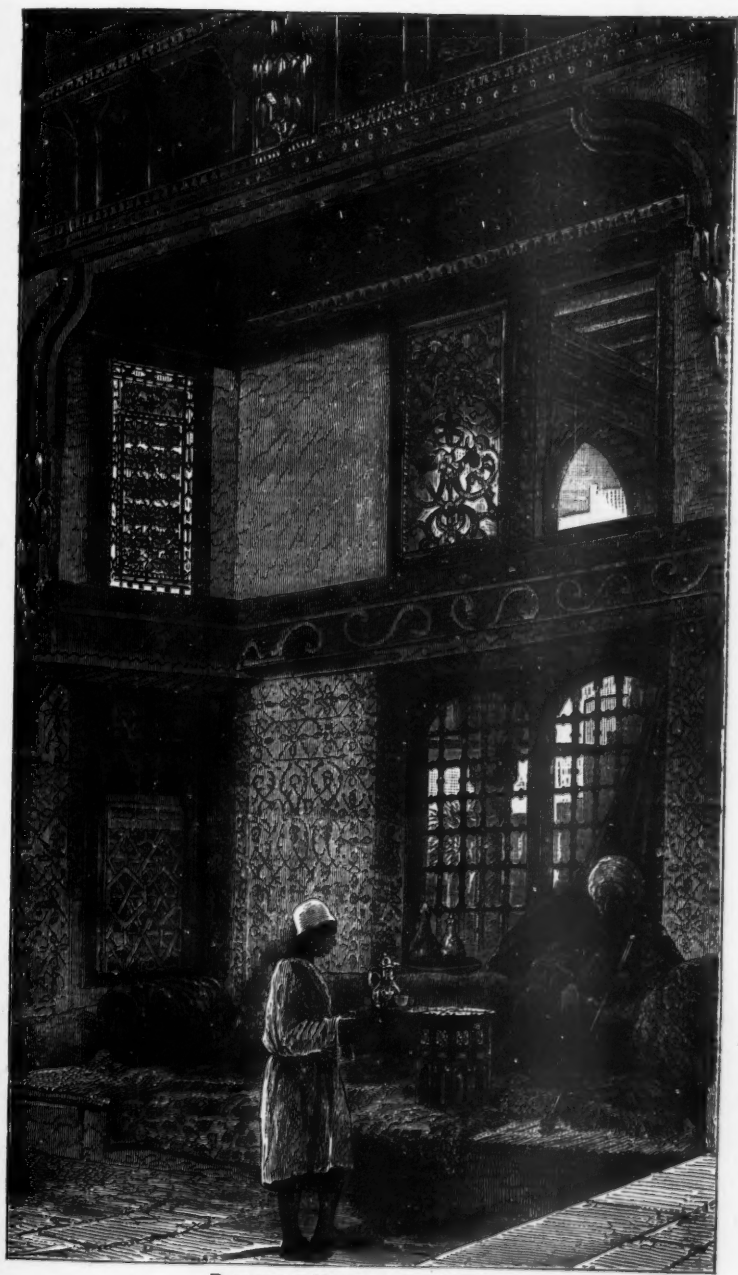
The afternoon of that same day, we had dismissed our donkeys, and were walking through some of the streets of the city, feeling that we should soon look upon them no more, when entering one of the quieter thoroughfares given up to large houses with gardens enclosed in high walls, we came upon what apparently was a festive scene. A certain house was decorated and adorned with drapery and lanterns, especial care being bestowed upon the doorway. A small crowd stood outside surrounding a brass band, which sent forth its harsh and peculiar Egyptian music. We asked the meaning of this excitement, and were informed that it was a marriage ; all this was part of the wedding festivity. As we passed the door, we halted an instant to gaze down the long wide passage decorated with drapery of some rich Eastern material. Flowers and evergreens also contributed their effect of colouring and freshness, and the whole arrangement was by no means unpicturesque.

At that moment a young man, none other than the bridegroom, simply dressed and very prepossessing, came forward, and seeing that we were strangers, politely asked us in. Apparently we were not expected to refuse, for he immediately turned and signed to us to follow.

Feeling suddenly placed under strange circumstances, but remembering that at Rome one should do as Rome does, we entered and accompanied our guide. Down a long wide passage draped and garlanded, until in a large courtyard we mounted some steps to a raised platform, where he ushered us to places of honour, a sort of canopy with a dais. Seated round the platform or raised room, were richly dressed, venerable-looking men, several of whom were imposing and dignified sheykhs. These were all waiting the arrival of the bride, who might now be expected at any moment.

All rose as we entered, saluted us in Eastern fashion, and sat down again.

Laughter formed no part of the entertainment ; a few looked solemn and composed, as if assisting at funeral rather than marriage



RECESS IN HOUSE OF A SHEYKH.

rites, whilst others discoursed with great earnestness and animation. The bridegroom moved about from one to another, the most merry-looking and animated of all. Bashfulness and nervousness seemed unknown to him.

The scene was striking and novel. The raised room or kiosk—impromptu for the occasion—was splendidly decorated. Beyond it was the courtyard, where palms and small orange trees flourished, whilst flowers and garlands abounded. A small fountain sent forth its musical plash. Beyond rose another section of the same house, with mushrabeeyeh windows. An enormous mushrabeeyeh screen, forming, as it were, part of the wall, concealed from view what lay behind. Whether bright eyes were looking down upon us, more invisible than cloistered nuns, we could not tell. We would have given much for a glimpse of the bride, but might as well have wished for Aladdin's lamp. Even if she arrived before our departure, we should see nothing of her veiled features.

In a few minutes coffee was brought to us in cups with delicate filigree holders, and presented with great earnestness by the bridegroom himself.

Unfortunately everything had to be carried on by dumb motions: the assembled guests could not understand our language, nor we theirs. A few civilities we exchanged with the bridegroom, interpreted by our dragoman, but he was only able to divide his favours, and we limited our remarks to an earnest desire for his happiness. He laid his hand upon his heart, bowed, and smiled in such hopeful content, that we could only trust our wishes might add something to his felicity present and future.

One thing was evident: the courtesies of life were intended and were gracefully offered. Seeing us strangers and pilgrims in a foreign land, they had tendered us that hospitality which is a marked feature in the East. If there was anything singular in this invitation of the moment to two unknown wayfarers passing their gates, it was not for us to criticise, but to accept in the spirit of the offering. Evidently to refuse would have been to bring a regret upon the bright and amiable face of our passing host.

It might be, too, that some slight superstition was added to the hospitable thought, and that a refusal would have been equivalent to throwing a slight shadow upon the life of the bridal pair. Superstition is one of the foundation stones that build up the character of this people in whom many excellences dwell, and it is a weakness not to be disregarded until rooted out by reason and education. To respect the prejudices of others is one of the first laws not only of good breeding but of Christianity. Probably the most cultivated and enlightened amongst us has his own pet superstition deep down in his heart; it is, as Goethe says, a part of the very essence of humanity; and if it is not the vulgar turning of money at the new moon, or getting out of bed habitually on one side, or searching for a second magpie when



LIGHT OF THE HAREM.

one crosses our path, it may exist in some more profound and unsuspected phase, as closely clung to, as religiously observed, as the open superstition of the Arabian.

Suddenly there was a stir and commotion without ; a wilder discord of music ; a sound of carriages dashing up, of a crowd making way. The bride's procession had arrived ; all rose to receive her.

The bridegroom went forward, nothing marking his emotion beyond a quickened footstep, a brighter eye.

Then the bride entered, followed by her maidens and relatives. She was closely veiled ; more closely than usual ; even the colour of her eyes could not be seen. These of course were dark and soft. The outline of her form could only be imagined ; but she appeared tall and graceful, with a small, well-balanced head. We could therefore fancy her pretty, and that the fortunate bridegroom had secured a prize in the matrimonial market.

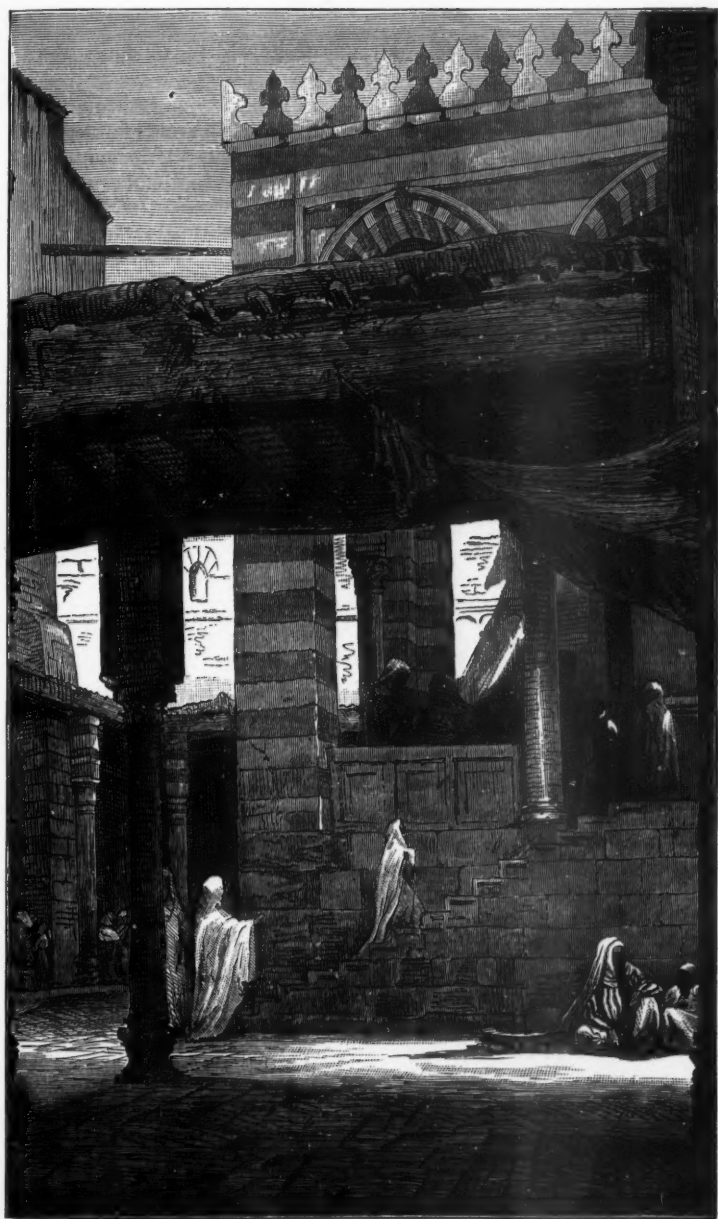
She did not mix with the bridegroom's friends. Slowly but without pausing, the bridal procession passed up the passage, and disappeared behind the large mushrabeeyeh screen, to the apartments dedicated to the harem. Here the bride would pass the remainder of the day in quietude and silence, with downcast eyes, spoken to by her friends and not replying, until one by one they would depart and leave her with no other attendant than her old duenna.

The bridegroom and his friends during this time would be enjoying each other's society. Presently a banquet would be served, followed by coffee and cigarettes, and at the hour of prayer, all would repair to the Mosque with lighted torches and tapers : after which the day's ceremonial would close.

But long before this we had taken our departure : as soon, indeed, as the bride's procession had disappeared within the seclusion of the harem.

With a final expression of our wishes for the happiness of our young host, we bade him farewell. He accompanied us down the garlanded passage, and as he had received us at his threshold, so there he bade us God-speed, shaking hands in a fashion more English than Oriental. To us it was a very pleasant incident, resulting in a momentary glimpse of one of the most important ceremonies and customs of this people, and yielding a happy remembrance for the time to come.

It was also one of our closing impressions of the Lotus-Land ; one of the last Eastern pictures that gilded our path. And so it was well that it should be of a sunny nature, with so much in it that was of human interest. There had been something especially winning in the young bridegroom : and somehow one felt that if all the nice people of earth could be turned into Positives and placed in one hemisphere, and all the opposite became Negatives and were placed in the other, the happier region would not be an empty paradise.



ENTERING THE SANCTUARY.

But for this consummation, devoutly to be wished, we must await the millennium.

And so the hour rang out when we too must bid farewell to the City of the Pyramids; when we took our last pilgrimage to the Citadel, and looked for the last time upon that wonderful panorama which embraces so many objects sacred to History, Religion, and Antiquity, without which the world would be so infinitely the poorer.

Before us the numberless mosques and minarets, in which we had delighted, towered above the streets and houses of Cairo, gilded and glorified by the declining sun; again the waters of the sacred Nile changed to blood red, and those marvels of Gizeh wore the tint of the blush-rose. These sunsets are the rule, not the exception in this Lotus-Land. Behind us, rising in unearthly vision, the slender minarets of Mohammed Ali were landmarks pointing heavenwards even to the far-off desert plains. The voice of the Muezzin rang out clear and distinct upon the startled air: "Allah! Allah! Allah! There is no God but God!" At our feet, in the pure and exquisite ruins of the Tombs of the Caliphs, the dead slept in surroundings that almost make death itself beautiful. Here on a certain night already long past, we had revelled in a moonlight scene unparalleled upon earth for chasteness and refinement: a scene the more memorable for the new-found friend who had sailed before us for the classic shores of the Bosphorus. But in Friendship, as in its twin sister Love, there is a talisman which laughs at time; one day becomes as a thousand years; and the new friendship seems only the friendship of some previous existence taken up where it had been interrupted.

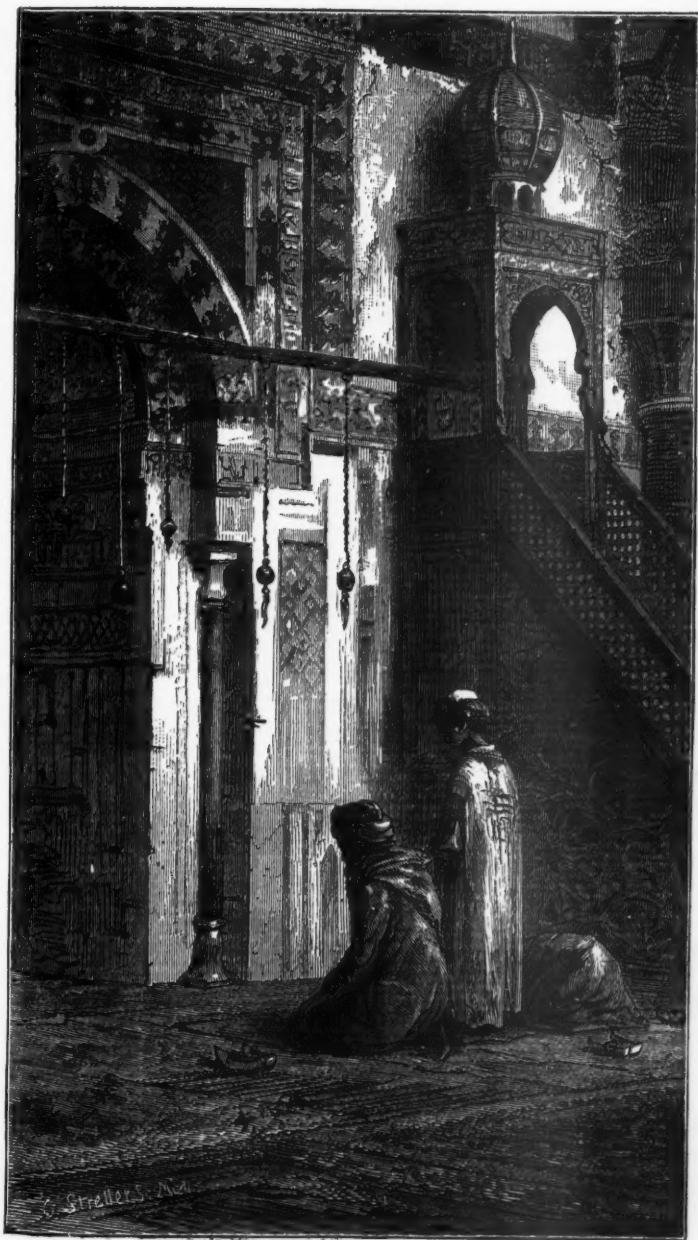
We looked upon the scene until the sun went down, and the gorgeous colours died out of the sky; and we pictured to ourselves the wonderful silence and solitude of those great desert wastes beyond the Pyramids, as Tum spread his mantle and Night and Darkness crept over the earth.

It was our last sunset from these heights, and with it our task ends.

To us the chronicling of these records has been a labour of love, for we cannot remember the time when the Lotus-Land had no place in our affections; but we hardly dare hope that the reader has followed us in our wanderings with equal pleasure. Yet patience has its reward: and everything draws to a conclusion.

Before another sunset we had turned our faces westward, away from the Lotus-Land. Our days had been crowded with interest, our nights with dreams of flowing rivers and mighty cities and a great people, mixed up with all the wonders of the Arabian Nights. The hours had passed as moments.

Only too soon does the end come on these occasions; as the end comes for all things in this changing world. Our life is made up of

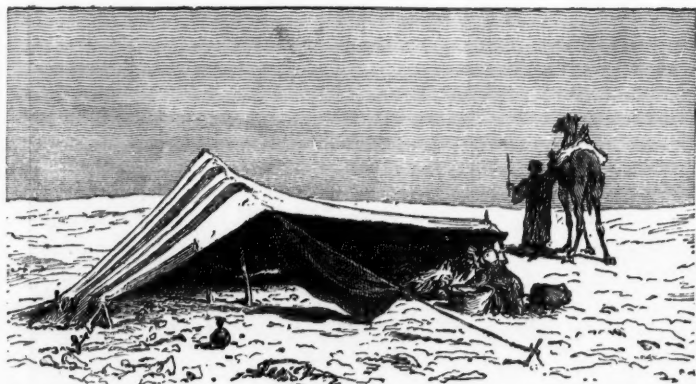


THE MECCA NICHE.

fragments ; much attempted, little accomplished ; and the undertones are those saddest of all words : Farewell and Nevermore. These like solemn bells for ever sound in our ears. All pleasures, all delights, are overshadowed by the thought : *This also shall pass away* ; and wise was that mighty Eastern king who had it engraved upon his ring as his life's motto. For the joys of everlasting youth, the repose of perfection, surcease of sorrow, each must wait until he has crossed a river far longer, deeper, colder, more terrible than the Nile, and taken a journey more solitary than the most untrodden wilds of the Great Desert itself.

But until the Dark Shadow falls and the silent wings are outspread ; until the silver cord is loosed and the wheel is broken at the cistern ; until the very last grain of life's golden sands has run out : there remains to us this glorious world, crowded with all its beauties of nature, art, antiquity : wonders even now beyond our mortal grasp : of which the Lotus-Land possesses more than its share.

And in taking leave of our beloved Lotus-Land, what better form can we employ than the words spoken by Osman as his train steamed away towards Alexandria : "*Adieu jusqu'au revoir ?*"



A DESERT HOME.

HAUNTED ASHCURCH.

IT was a lonesome little country church, quite deserted and rapidly falling into decay. The nearest house was that of old Joe Salter, the blacksmith, and that was fully half-a-mile away. It could not be said that the little fabric possessed anything of architectural beauty or interest : a plain, oblong building, with a square, thick-set, squat tower. It had no chancel.

It was hard upon fifty years since regular services had been discontinued at Ashchurch, owing to the building and endowment of a handsome new church, nearer the centre of population and better adapted to the requirements of the parish.

For about the first half of these fifty years, the cracked old bell of Ashchurch still rang occasionally for the funerals of old residents of the parish ; for the churchyard was not declared closed when the Sunday services ceased.

But the time came when the authorities decided that henceforward all burials must be in the new cemetery.

Up to that time, the aged church had been kept in some sort of repair, and had, at any rate, been water-tight. But, from that time, the efforts made to keep it so had been but spasmodic and inadequate, and, year by year, it became more and more dilapidated.

The ivy now grew in unchecked luxuriance, not only over the walls, but over the roof. As for the tower, it became a perfect bush of creepers under which the form of the masonry was concealed, like that of an esquimaux in his furs.

The once trim laurel hedge put forth greedy arms, and embraced within its unwieldy and irregular width many of the moss-grown gravestones. Grass grew coarse and rank on the churchyard paths. Here and there a headstone or mound of green turf showed signs of care and loving tendance ; but, as a rule, the graves, like the church itself, looked neglected and desolate, and some were hidden by fox-glove and nettles.

A stranger, accidentally detained in the parish by the effects of a fall from his horse, being convalescent, had strolled aimlessly down the narrow, winding lane, which led to the church, and, coming suddenly upon it, had been struck by its forlorn appearance.

Leaning over the rusty-hinged churchyard gate, he descried a woman and a sturdy girl hurriedly weeding one of the smallest of the green mounds of its rank growth of dock-leaves. His attention could not but be arrested by the headlong haste which characterised their performance of a task over which love usually lingers long.

As he was desirous of learning something of the history of the church, and of the causes of its present state of decay, he, with some

difficulty, opened the crazy old gate and went towards them. But though he succeeded, by dint of questioning, in eliciting most of the facts, of which the reader is already in possession, he found the woman far from communicative and evidently anxious to be gone. Once only did her natural love of gossip prompt her to impart unsolicited information.

"Volks hereabout *du* say," she began, "ez how *she* had a hand——" But here, as though frightened at her own impulse, she broke off abruptly and, turning short round, ambled off at the top of her speed, closely followed by the girl, without shutting the gate behind her. The stranger heard the patter of their feet hurrying down the lane, and smiled the superior smile of an educated man.

"Some superstitious fancy!" he said to himself.

Choosing a flat tombstone, he lay down at full length thereon, and gave himself up to the full enjoyment of the lovely summer's evening. The pure physical pleasure of it, to one who had so lately been an invalid, was most grateful and soothing.

The intense quiet of the place, amid the sound sleepers beneath the sod, its touching air of desertion and its uncared-for aspect, the history of the abandonment of the church—all appealed strongly to his imagination, and he was soon lost in a dreamland of musings. At length, warned, by a cold gust of evening air, that he was hardly strong enough yet to risk being out in the dew, he rose to go.

He was amazed to find that he must have been there over two hours. It was getting dusk, and his watch told him it was half-past eight. He turned to take one last look at the lorn church, and, as he did so, caught a glimpse of the white drapery of a woman's skirts in the act of disappearing round the north-west corner of the tower.

He had a strong distaste for anything like intrusion on the privacy of one who was possibly visiting the grave of a relation, and he accordingly left the churchyard, without again turning his head.

But he was conscious that it cost him a strong effort to do so, owing to a most extraordinary craving, which he could not for the life of him explain, to look round the corner of the tower. On his emerging from the lane, he saw the cheerful glow of the blacksmith's forge some way ahead. Salter had done some work for him, and it might, he thought, be as well to ask the loan of a top-coat for the rest of his way home. In height and build they were much alike. So he turned in at the half-door of the forge.

"My sakes!" said the blacksmith, heartily, "why, it's Muster Cortram. Glad to see you, sir, out and aboot, though 'tis maist too sharp a evening, and you not quite set oop, as ye may say."

"True, Salter, and so I've come to ask you to lend me an overcoat."

"Right you are, sir, and welcome, too; but set ye down and have a warm first."

And the blacksmith, mindful of the duties of hospitality, drew his

shirt-sleeves down over his mighty arms, and proceeded to light a pipe, by way of company to Mr. Cortram's cigar.

"'Tis a quaint spot this close by you," said the latter, as he struck a light and passed it over to Salter.

"Meaning——?" queried the smith, as he held the match over the bowl.

"Ashchurch."

Salter let the match drop.

"What! have you been there at this hour o' night?"

"Hour of night indeed! Why, it is barely dusk, and what is more, some lady or other is probably there still."

This time the blacksmith dropped his pipe, and it was smashed against the anvil in the fall. The man was pale as death.

"What ails you, Salter, my man? Here, have a cigar."

Salter took no notice of the proffered cigar-case. With an effort he drew himself up to his full height, and, in the deep shadows and strong lights of the forge he looked like a prophet of the olden time as he said, most earnestly and solemnly:

"Mr. Cortram, sir, go ye home, do ye now, and pray to-night when ye sez yer prayers, as in coorse ye do, that no harm may come this night to you or any av yer famuly."

Mr. Cortram respected the man's emotion, though quite at a loss to guess its cause, and, without bothering him further about the overcoat, walked briskly home.

Next day he sallied forth as usual in the evening for a stroll, but had not gone far when he met a mounted messenger from the telegraph office of the neighbouring town, who recognised him and handed him a telegram. It announced the sudden death of an uncle the previous evening at half-past eight o'clock. The recollection came to him like a sudden gust of icy wind, chilling his heart, that, at that very time, he had seen the mysterious white dress fluttering round the corner of Ashchurch tower. Why his instinct connected the two things together he could not divine. He was by no means a fanciful man, but was generally credited with a clear head and strong common-sense.

Having the responsibility for the arrangements of his uncle's funeral, he left the place that evening.

Some months went on, but, notwithstanding a great pressure of business, which came upon him in consequence of his uncle's death, the mystery of Ashchurch continually recurred to him. The strange behaviour of the peasant woman in the churchyard, the unexplained emotion of the blacksmith, his own strong and unaccountable yearning, that memorable evening, to look behind the tower, the odd coincidence of his uncle's death with his glimpse of the white dress, passed and repassed before his mind's eye over and over again.

One evening he had sat down to look over old papers and letters, with a view to destroying what was worthless. His uncle's corres-

pondence had been extensive, and the task was a fatiguing one. He was on the point of giving it up for the night, when, out of one of the letters, there dropped a square piece of yellow-looking paper which fluttered down upon the carpet. He listlessly picked it up.

The inscription on it was so curiously in accord with the subject uppermost in his thoughts, that he was roused into strong interest. It ran thus :—

“ Her vesture, dimly seen afar,
To him who sees, an evil star ;
Her self who sees, he shall be blest,
And give her weary spirit rest.”

His mind was so possessed with the conviction that the two first lines of the doggerel described what he had himself recently experienced, that he felt no surprise, at the time, on reading at the head of the letter in which the paper had been enclosed, the word “Ashchurch,” over the date.

The letter turned out to be one written to his uncle by a former resident in the parish of Ashchurch, who had been many years dead.

It gave a long account of the Ashchurch ghost, quoting several cases of its white robes having been seen in the moment of their disappearance round a corner of the church—always the same corner, viz. the north west, and, in each case, some disaster was found to have befallen the person witnessing the spectral appearance at the very moment of the ghostly dress having been seen.

Strangely enough, Cortram had never heard his uncle mention the subject, and, up to the date of his accident some months before, he had never even heard the name of Ashchurch. On turning to his uncle's diary he found, within a week of the date of the letter, the following entry :—

“Went to Ashchurch ghost-hunting, to prove to poor Conner what fudge it all is.”

The next entry was a fortnight later :—

“Not so sure about fudge. I certainly saw something ; but it was probably a wreath of mist.”

And three days further on :—

“George died the very night, and the very hour, in which I saw that something.”

George was a cousin.

It appeared, from Mr. Conner's letter, that the rhymes on the bit of paper were a copy from an old parchment found in a chest in Ashchurch tower. Cortram carefully preserved both the letter and the copy of verses. His uncle had left him all his property, and he therefore wound up his own business, and settled down, as best he could, to the life of a country gentleman.

But he felt that the associations of Ashchurch had taken so powerful a hold of him that he could not shake it off. He had a feeling that, in some inexplicable way, against which his will seemed

powerless to contend, he was being drawn to visit the place again. He long battled with the feeling as being morbid and childish. But finding that he was growing hippish and sleepless, he determined to try whether the actual sight of the place would not work a cure.

So about a twelvemonth after his first visit to it, he found himself once more in the Ashchurch lane, on an evening late in June.

He had been some days in the parish and had employed the interval in getting as much information as he could out of the oldest inhabitants; but this amounted to little beyond what he had already learned from Mr. Conner's letter to his uncle.

Of late years even the lane leading to the church had been religiously shunned by the parishioners; and a ghost, it is plain, cannot be seen without somebody to see it.

One additional piece of evidence, however, he had got at quite accidentally.

It happened that one day he had called upon the village doctor, whose acquaintance, in his professional capacity, he had made during his last stay in Ashchurch. The doctor was a squarely-built, weather-beaten man, as prosaic and matter-of-fact as a man could be. The conversation turned upon Mr. Conner.

"I knew him well," observed Dr. Cawson, "and attended him for some years before his death. He died at five minutes past four, on December 10th, twelve and a half years ago."

"Do you always remember so accurately the time of your patients' departure, Dr. Cawson?"

"Why—no! But there were peculiar circumstances——"

"Do tell me what they were."

"If you will promise not to laugh at me. It fell out, that afternoon, that I had been paying some professional visits, and was returning home by Ashchurch Lane on foot. I remembered that, in a corner of the churchyard, there grew a herb which I had often found useful, so I jumped over the gate to gather some. I was busy doing so, when I remembered I had another engagement later on and must make haste. Glancing at my watch I found it was five minutes past four. Just then, in the dim light, I saw the white train of a woman's dress disappearing round the corner of the church. It was so real, to my mind, that I felt sure I should have seen the whole figure if I had raised my head earlier. I had heard of the same sort of thing having been noticed before, and am not ashamed to say that I got back into the lane and home as fast as ever I could. When I reached my own door, I found that a messenger had been sent by Mrs. Conner, in my absence, to say I was urgently wanted, as Mr. Conner had been suddenly taken worse. I went immediately, but was too late. He had died at five minutes past four."

"And have you any theory about it, doctor—any explanation?" The doctor shrugged his shoulders, and the conversation changed.

Thinking of this, among other things, Cortram slowly proceeded

towards the church. He felt a strong presentiment of some coming event approaching him with the slow steps of fate.

The gate had grown so rusty that it was some time before he could force it open. A hasty glance round the churchyard told him that neglect and decay were rapidly doing their work. The place was a greater picture of desolation than ever. He stationed himself where he could best watch the north-west corner of the building, leaning his arms on a headstone, and concentrating his whole attention on the spot where the apparition had before shown itself.

For a long time he so remained till his eyes began to ache with the fixity of their gaze.

At length there appeared on the surface of the ground, not more than two yards from the corner of the tower, a sort of wreath of vapour, as it seemed, gradually gathering consistency and moving very slowly along the ground towards the tower till at length it took the semblance of trailing garments.

It was in the act of disappearing as it had done before, when with a peculiar wavy motion of the drapery it suddenly seemed to halt, leaving still a portion distinctly visible, as though the mysterious wearer of the dress were standing just behind the ivy-covered corner.

Cortram felt his hair stand on end, and a cold dew seemed to break out on his forehead. Nevertheless he felt impelled to advance, as though some hidden agency within him, more powerful than his own will, were using his limbs for its own purpose.

And still, as he got more abreast of the tower, as well as nearer to it, more and more of the ghostly drapery became disclosed, till at length the tall figure of a woman, with a hood drawn over her face, stood close beside him.

Cortram, as though in a dream, heard a voice he did not recognise as his own, yet a voice using his tongue and his lips, say, in a hoarse whisper :

“In Heaven’s name, what troubles you?”

Slowly the hood fell from the figure’s face, a face unutterably sad and inexpressibly sweet, and its shadowy hand pointed to the wall of the tower. Then the lines of the shape grew indistinct and it melted away. Cortram staggered forward and marked the spot towards which the hand had pointed by tearing down a twig of ivy.

He then, with a shiver, hurried homewards, but a deadly faintness came over him, and ere he had gone many yards, he fell down in a swoon. When he came to himself, the moon was high in heaven, and it was close upon midnight.

As he crept home to his lodgings, stiff and cold, he determined to come next day alone and thoroughly examine the spot he had marked—having the profoundest conviction that he was on the verge of some discovery. Accordingly, after a good night’s rest, feeling no ill effects from his adventure of the previous evening, he went once more to the little churchyard.

He found the branch of ivy hanging down with drooping leaves, and after some groping, he discovered a chink in the wall, into which he could thrust his hand, and out of which he drew a small wooden box, with clamps of iron at the corners, and tightly shut. With the help of a chisel which he had brought with him he burst it open.

Within there lay a paper folded and sealed. He opened and read it. In modern English it ran as follows :

"I, George Cord, killed my wife, Grace Mabel Cord, taking her unawares with a knife in the back, on the 3rd of August, 1742, when she was going round the corner of Ashchurch Tower, to visit our baby's grave, which was my pretext for getting her into a lonesome place, being firmly set to take her life. I buried her in a hole dug under the hornbeam on the north side. God help me! I have spilt the blood of the purest and sweetest wife ever man had, on foul and most unworthy suspicion, which drove me mad. I have this day found proof of her utter innocence. I leave this confession where the next comer will not fail to find it. In five minutes I shall swing dead from a limb of the hornbeam. And may God have mercy on my soul."

Cortram folded the paper carefully up, and having put it in his pocket, after replacing the box in the chink of the wall, went straight to the parish doctor's house. He caught him as he was starting off on his rounds.

"One word, doctor. Have you ever heard of one, George Cord, who committed suicide in Ashchurch some hundred years ago?"

"Yes, they say a rich young squire of that name hanged himself on a tree in the churchyard."

"Was any reason alleged?"

"The tale goes that his heart was broken by an unfaithful wife, who left him, and was never seen or heard of more."

"It was a lie, and I can prove it."

The doctor stared.

"Come to my room, after you have been your rounds, and I will tell you all about it."

The doctor and Cortram took such steps as were possible to clear the memory of George Cord's wife of the cloud which had so long rested upon it.

Her husband must have meant to place the little box in as conspicuous a position as possible, but it had dropped out of the trembling fingers, further into the chink than he had intended, and the ivy had grown over it. The poor bones under the hornbeam were given Christian burial in the husband's grave, and the dust of the murderer and the murdered commingle in peaceful rest.

It was the last funeral in the old churchyard. Nevermore were the ghostly trailing garments seen sweeping round the corner of Ashchurch Tower.

THE UGLY MAN.

THERE were five of us—all girls—and I was the Cinderella. My four sisters had been educated in Paris, each had been presented at Court, and each had made her *début* in London society under the wing of a distant cousin, Lady Elizabeth Tabor.

But none of my sisters were married. Why, I was never allowed to question—there was a profound silence on the subject, and no opinion had ever been ventured by any member of the family as to the cause of their perpetual maidenhood. But Janet, the maid-of-all-works, had been heard to remark, "I'll eat my head if it isn't all on account of them family warts on the sides of their noses." And I firmly believe it became the accepted idea.

Now I had escaped this obnoxious and disfiguring inheritance, and therefore, in spite of the fact that there was no money left to educate me, and not the ghost of a chance of a London season of presentation at Court: in spite, I say, of all this, my family regarded me as a possible matrimonial subject.

I was very minute, and I don't think I was a beauty; but there was a fair amount of intelligence in my face, and the country air and simple life had kept the round roses in my cheeks, and the light in my nut-brown hair and green-grey eyes. But I never had time to think about these things: I have called myself the Cinderella, and that means that I was incessantly employed from morning till night, because, you see, I had no accomplishments to "keep up," and *someone* had to do the dusting, baking, preserving, and family millinery, and if I had had more leisure I doubt if I should have spent it otherwise than I did. My recreation in summer was a book in the cherry-tree, high up in the thick branches, where I could plant my feet and rest my back, and forward my self-cultivation. In winter, when the flooded fields were frozen, I wove my dreams of wild romance as I rushed through the frosty air on my skates and drank to intoxication the winter's fairy wine.

It was summer time when I first saw the Ugly Man, and it happened in this wise. The cherry-tree, in which I sat, flourished outside our rectory garden in a field, through which there was a short cut to the market-place. My father had made this footpath in consideration for some of his aged parishioners who had to carry heavy baskets backwards and forwards to market, and who in gratitude had never abused his kindness by robbing his fruit-trees, or trespassing on the adjoining fields. So that one hot August afternoon, I was somewhat surprised to see from my arm-chair in the leafy boughs a man slowly approaching me, with evident intention of taking a nap beneath the shade of my tree.

But as he came nearer I saw he was a gentleman and a stranger.

I could not see his face, peep through the branches as I might, and I had not a chance when he sat down with his back to me and drew his hat over his eyes.

I did not stir lest he might discover me and become a bore, and I read on without further thought of him. But whether it was the sultriness of the day, or the proximity to the slave of Morpheus below, a dreadful drowsiness overcame me, my eyelids closed, my mouth opened, the book in my hands slipped slowly down, down, from branch to branch, till it landed plump on the individual's hat.

I started in horror, and he sprang to his feet, picked up the volume and examined the flyleaf carefully,

"HILDA REEVES.

FROM HERSELF.

—
'Where'er she lie,
Locked up from mortal eye,
In shady leaves of destiny.'

Then he looked up, and bobbed about like a jack-in-the-box till he saw me. I was staring down upon him, not at all inclined to apologise, and disgusted at his ugliness. He was a clean-shaven man of about thirty, with a large, deeply lined mouth, a huge forehead, and tiresomely piercing eyes that were bound to discover whatever they searched for.

"Is this your book?" he asked, raising his hat. At any rate, his voice was mellifluous.

"Yes; I am so sorry it fell! Were you hurt?"

"Not in the least! But am I trespassing; is this private land? I thought by the foot-path——"

"Oh, it doesn't matter a bit. You are a stranger here, I suppose. The field belongs to the rectory, but any one may pass through it. Pray resume your rest, unless I have disturbed you too completely."

"And you? How shall I give you back your book?"

"Don't trouble, I am coming down." And I began to spring in my usual way from branch to branch. Whether I was too anxious to perform my feat as gracefully as possible, or whether I turned giddy, I don't know, but when the passage became a little intricate I lost my footing and slipped, and must have come a crash to the ground, if the Ugly Man had not stretched out his arms and caught me. Once on my feet again I looked up at him with flaming cheeks and dishevelled hair.

"How very clumsy of me; I feel so annoyed."

"Please don't—it was a presumption, but what was I to do? You would certainly have injured yourself if I hadn't caught you."

I held out my hand. "I was ungrateful! Come back to the house with me, and let me give you a cup of tea."

His hand closed over mine for a brief second—nay, it was an electric eternity! An unutterable thrill shook me from head to foot

when I met his touch, and I led the way to the rectory in silence with a strange wonder at my heart.

Everyone was out but my father, and I took my rescuer straight to the library, and explained the circumstances. A few minutes later, when I entered with the tea-tray, I found them in interested conversation. The Ugly Man came to my assistance, with a quietness and grace, that went well with his slight, delicate figure. If only he hadn't been quite so ugly! I watched his face narrowly, as he talked, to try and discover some redeeming feature, but the light was uncertain, and he sat with his back to it; once when he shifted his seat, and glanced at me with some question, I caught a gleam from his eyes that was almost an electric flash, and I saw they were as clear and blue as the heavens.

He had travelled a great deal, and had just returned to England to see after some property that had come into his command.

"You are like our neighbour, Sir Guy Prior," my father said; "he has been abroad for years, and now his old rascal of an uncle is dead, he has come to take up his abode among us—at least I hope so, for I like the look of him. I saw him as I passed the place this morning giving his orders for the laying out of some waste land."

"What sort of a man is he—young?" The Ugly Man spoke with indifference, and I began to wonder if after all he were not laughing at us, and our unsophisticated ways.

"Quite a lad," my father replied. "Must you go? well, I am very much obliged to you, my good sir, for your kindness to my little daughter; I hope it will cure her of risking her neck again."

"I am afraid I made the risk," he answered, smiling, and bending on me, as he thrilled me once more with his touch, a long, scrutinizing gaze.

My sisters were delighted with my adventure, and I refrained from describing my rescuer, that they might have the full benefit of a possible romance. But it fell to the ground a few days afterwards, when I was busy jam-making, and saw him swing up the path. A ridiculous rush of blood flew to my face, and I had no time to wrench off my sticky apron before he had reached the window, and was smiling in upon me.

"I have come to fetch my stick I left here," he explained; "I hope I am not a bother."

I unfastened the kitchen door and let him in.

"What hot work," he said, laughing at my refusal to give him a sticky hand; "isn't it too much for you?"

"It will soon be done."

To my astonishment, before I would raise the least objection he had seated me comfortably in the cushioned window-seat, and was stirring the stew-pan himself. He asked for directions, and I gave them, and watched him with intense amusement complete the business by filling the jam jars that were waiting on the table.

"Now I think I have earned a request, Miss Hilda," he said coolly.

"What is it?"

"That you will let me sit here with you a few minutes and smell the honeysuckle."

I drew into my corner, and he seated himself opposite to me, and soon he had landed me in burning fields of poesy and art. The clock struck five, and I started up.

"Come into the drawing-room," I said; "I must get tea, and you will find my sisters there."

My father showed great pleasure at seeing him again, and welcomed him warmly. I knew my sisters' expression so well, that I felt inclined to laugh right out as I read their disappointment, and I knew their thoughts as if they had uttered them—"Ugly little man!" "Hideous little monster!" And when they heard his name was plain John Smith, their disgust was supreme. However, they good-naturedly assured me when he had gone, that they would not stand in my way. And they left me day after day as the summer slipped away, and I found myself constantly by his side, to entertain him as I would. I had no thoughts of falling in love, but gradually and absolutely my whole heart went out to him in all its fire of passion, and there was only restlessness and torture for me away from him. Soul to soul we spoke of things that touched our keenest sensibilities, and life became a grand, glorious reality to me.

No one had made the acquaintance yet of Sir Guy Prior, but he was giving a big "house-warming," and we were all invited. My sisters were elated; each in her heart dreamed of triumph at last! They discussed their dresses, and I set up with them night after night to help the anxious preparations. They tried good-naturedly to arrange a gown for me, but nothing would fit, and there was no time for alterations. I did not care in the least, till the Ugly Man, as we continued to call him, said to me the day before, "How many dances will you give me to-morrow?"

"Oh!" I cried, "are *you* going?"

"Yes. You looked dreadfully concerned!"

I turned my face from his searching glance, and answered in a choking voice: "Because—because *I* can't go!"

My hands were locked to his breast, and he was kissing my brow.

"Do you care so much, little Hilda? Do you love me?"

I raised my eyes to his, and our lips met in one, long, passionate kiss.

"You shall—you must go!" he said presently. "I'm going in to bully those selfish sisters of yours."

"Oh, don't; they don't mean to be unkind! It has been so hard for them never to marry, and perhaps this Sir Guy will take a fancy to one of them."

John threw back his head and pealed with laughter.

"I don't want to be rude—but really, darling——"

"You are very rude," I interrupted, "and I've a great mind to come to the ball in my white muslin just to shame you."

"Is *that* all? Is it only a question of *dress*? Why, Hilda, you are perfectly lovely in that soft white gown. Promise me to wear nothing else."

I knew what a dear, whimsical thing he was, and I was mad to go, so in spite of all my sisters' remonstrances the white muslin was washed and ironed, and by nine o'clock the next night I had it on ready to start. Then a sweet surprise came to me. Janet rushed into my room with a large box in her arms.

"That sweetheart of yours has sent you some flowers, ducky!"

I opened the lid, and there lay the most exquisite wreath of lilies-of-the-valley. One I wound completely round my neck, one among my dark coils, and the rest Janet fashioned about my skirt as she chose. I gazed at myself a moment in the glass, I saw the dazzling whiteness of my bosom and arms, and I thought how fair love can make all commonplaces.

The ballroom was crowded when we arrived. My father made for a stripling youth and introduced himself and his daughters.

"Oh! I am not Sir Guy," the boy said, "I am only his agent. Here he is."

John Smith was coming eagerly towards us with outstretched hand.

"Let me welcome you with all my heart," he said, "to my ancestral home—and to apologise with deep contrition for what I have done."

No one spoke. My sisters were on the point of fainting.

"It was such a temptation," he went on, "to make myself liked in an unconventional way, and I never should have won my wife so easily if there had been the bridge of ceremony to cross. Hilda, won't you forgive me?"

I took his arm with a proud glad smile, and felt just as Cinderella did when the slipper fitted none other.

LILIAN STREET.



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"JUST WHEN THE LAST GOLD LINGERS IN THE WEST."

[To face page 32.]

AT EVENSONG.

IF I could call you back for one brief hour,
It is at evensong that hour should be,
When bells are chiming from an old grey tower
Across the tranquil sea.

Just when the fields are sweet and cool with dew,
Just when the last gold lingers in the west,
Would I recall you to the world you knew
Before you went to rest.

And where the starry jasmin hides the wall,
We two would stand together once again ;
I know your patience,—I would tell you all
My tale of love and pain.

And you would listen with your tender smile,
Tracing the lines upon my tear-worn face,
And finding, even for a little while,
Our earth a weary place.

Only one little hour ! And then once more
The bitter word, farewell, beset with fears,
And all my pathway darkened, as before,
With shades of lonely years.

Far better, dear, that you, unfelt, unseen,
Should hover near me in the quiet air,
And draw my spirit through this mortal screen
Your higher life to share.

I would not call you back ; and yet, ah me !
Faith is so weak, and human love so strong,
That sweet it seems to think of what might be
This hour at evensong.

SARAH DOUDNEY.



THE WEIRD VIOLIN.

THE great Polish violinist, S——, was strolling aimlessly about the town, on a sunny, but cold afternoon, in November of a certain year. He was to play, at night, at one of the great concerts which made the town so musically famous, and, according to his usual custom, he was observing passers-by, looking in shop windows, and thinking of anything rather than the approaching ordeal. Not that he was nervous, for none could be less so, but he came to his work all the fresher for an hour or two of idle forgetfulness, and astonished his audiences the more.

Turning out of the busiest street, he ambled into a comparatively quiet thoroughfare, and, throwing away an inch of cigar-end, produced a new havannah, lighting up with every sign of enjoyment. Now, it was part of his rule, when out on these refreshing excursions, to avoid music shops, and he had already passed half-a-dozen without doing more than barely recognise them. It is therefore very remarkable that, walking by a large music warehouse in this quiet thoroughfare, he should suddenly stop, and, after remaining in doubt for a few moments, go straight to the window, and look in.

He had not seen anything when he first passed, and, indeed, he had merely ascertained, out of the corner of his eye, that one of the forbidden shops was near. Why, then, did he feel impelled to return?

The window was stocked, as all such windows are, with instruments, music, and such appurtenances as resin, bows, chin-rests, mutes, strings, bridges and pegs. An old Guarnierus, valued at several hundred guineas, lay alongside a shilling set of bones, and a flageolet, an ocarina, and several mouth-organs were gracefully grouped upon a gilt-edged copy of "Elijah."

Amongst the carefully-arranged violins was a curious old instrument the like of which the virtuoso had never seen before, and at this he now stared with all his eyes. It was an ugly, squat violin, of heavy pattern, and ancient appearance. The maker, whoever he had been, had displayed considerable eccentricity throughout its manufacture, but more especially in the scroll, which, owing to some freak, he had carved into the semblance of a hideous, grinning face. There was something horribly repulsive about this strange work of art, and yet it also possessed a subtle fascination. The violinist, keeping his eyes upon the face, which seemed to follow his movements with fiendish persistency, slowly edged to the door, and entered the shop.

The attendant came forward, and recognising the well-known performer, bowed low.

"That is a curious-looking fiddle in the window," began the artist, at once, with a wave of his hand in the direction of the fiend.

"Which one, sir?" inquired the attendant. "Oh, the one with the remarkable scroll, you mean. I'll get it for you." Drawing aside a little curtain, he dived into the window-bay, and produced the instrument, whose face seemed to be grinning more maliciously than ever.

"A fair tone, sir," added the man, "but nothing to suit you, I'm sure."

As soon as Herr S—— touched the neck of the violin he gripped it convulsively, and raised the instrument to his chin. Then, for a few moments, he stood, firm as a rock, his eyes fixed upon the awe-stricken attendant, evidently without seeing him.

"A bow," said the musician, at length, in a low voice. He stretched out his disengaged hand and took it, without moving his eyes. Then he stopped four strings with his long fingers, and drew the horse-hair smartly over them with one rapid sweep, producing a rich chord in a minor key.

A slight shiver passed over his frame as the notes were struck, and the look of concentration upon his face, changed to one of horror; but he did not cease. Slowly drooping his gaze, the performer met the gibing glance of the scroll-face, and though his own countenance blanched, and his lips tightened, as if to suppress a cry, the bow was raised again, and the violin spoke.

Did the demon whisper to those moving, nervous fingers? It almost seemed to be doing so; and surely such a melody as came from the instrument was born of no human mind. It was slow and measured, but no solemnity was suggested; it thrilled the frame, but with terror, not delight; it was a chain of sounds, which like a sick man's passing fancy, slipped out of the memory as soon as it was evolved, and was incapable of being recalled.

Slowly, when the last strains were lost, the great violinist dropped both arms to his side, and stood for a few moments, grasping violin and bow, without speaking. There were drops of perspiration on his forehead, and he was pale and weary-looking; when he spoke, it was in a faint voice, and he seemed to address himself to something invisible.

"I cannot endure it now," he said. "I will play again to-night."

"Do you wish to play on the instrument at this evening's concert, sir?" inquired the dealer, not without some astonishment at the choice, much as the performance had affected him.

"Yes—yes, of course!" was the reply, given with some irritability, the speaker having apparently roused himself from his semi-stupor.

As the dealer took back the fiddle, he chanced to turn it back uppermost. It was a curiously marked piece of wood, a black patch spreading over a large portion, and throwing an ugly blur upon the otherwise exquisite purfling.

"See!" gasped the artist, pointing a shaking finger at this blotch, and clutching at the shopkeeper's shoulder. "Blood!"

"Good gracious!" ejaculated the other, shrinking back in alarm. "Are you ill, sir?"

"Blood, blood!" repeated the half-demented musician, and he staggered out of the shop.

It was night, and the concert-room was crowded to excess. The performers upon the platform, accustomed as they were to such sights, could not but gaze with interest at the restless sea of eager, expectant faces which stretched before them.

That indescribable noise, a multitude of subdued murmurs, accompanied by the discordant scraping of strings, and blowing of reeds, was at its height; now and then a loud trombone would momentarily assert itself, or an oboe's plaintive notes would rise above the tumult; and, in short, the moment of intense excitement which immediately precedes the entrance of the conductor was at hand.

Suddenly, the long-continued confusion ceased, and, for an incalculably short space of time, silence reigned. Then a storm of deafening applause burst forth; necks were craned, and eyes strained in vain attempts to catch an early glimpse of the great violinist who was to open the concert by playing a difficult Concerto of Spohr.

It was noticed, that as the virtuoso followed the grey-haired conductor to the centre of the platform, he was unusually pale; and those who were seated at no great distance from the orchestra, observed also that he carried a curious violin, instead of the Stradivarius upon which he was wont to perform.

A tap on the conductor's desk, a short, breathless silence, and the sweet strains of the opening bars issued from the instruments of a hundred able musicians.

The soloist, with a sinking at the heart which he could scarcely account for, raised the violin to his shoulder, and saw, for the first time, that it had been re-strung. As he invariably left stringing and tuning to others, this would appear to have been a matter of no moment, and yet it had a strange effect upon him. Again that shudder passed through his body, and again he unwillingly met the glance of those diabolical eyes upon the scroll. Horror of horrors! was the face alive, or was he going mad?

The band, which had swelled out to a loud forte, now dropped to a pianissimo. The moment had arrived. Herr S—— raised his bow, and commenced the lovely adagio.

What had come to him? Where were the concert room, the orchestra, the anxious crowd of people? What sounds were these? This was not Spohr, this sweet melody so like, and yet so unlike the weird music which he had played in the dealer's shop. What subtle magic had so acted upon those strains that their horror, their cruel mockery had entirely vanished, and sweet, pure harmony alone remained?

It seemed to the player that he stood within a small, but comfortably

furnished room. Two figures were in the room, those of a beautiful young girl, and of a dark, handsome, foreign-looking man.

There was something in the face of the latter which vividly recalled the face upon the scroll, and, strange to say, a counterpart of the violin itself rested under the man's chin.

The girl was seated at a harpsichord, and, as she played, her companion accompanied her upon his strange instrument. From the costume of both, the dreamer concluded that they were phantoms of a hundred years ago.

"Ernestine," the man was saying, in a low voice, as he passed his bow over the strings, "tell me to-night that you have not dismissed me for ever. I can wait for your love."

"It is useless," replied the girl—"oh, it is quite useless! Why importune me further? I could never love you, even if I were not already promised to another."

A savage light gleamed in the man's eye, and more than ever he looked like the face on the violin; but he did not immediately reply, and the music went on.

"You tell me it is useless," he said, at length, "and I tell *you* that it is useless. Useless for you to think of him. Do you hear?" he continued, lowering his violin, and leaning towards her. "You shall never marry him; I swear it by my soul."

The girl shrank from him, and the music ceased. Though he did not know it, the dreaming violinist had reached the conclusion of the adagio movement. He did not hear the deafening plaudits which greeted the fall of his bow; he knew nothing of the enthusiasm of the orchestra, or the praise of the conductor; he heard no more music.

Look! what is this? The girl has seated herself upon a couch, and her lover, his violin still in his left hand, is kneeling at her feet, passionately imploring her to listen. She expostulates for awhile, then repulses him and rises. A malignant fire darts from the furious foreigner's eyes; something bright gleams in his hand; he rushes forward, raises his arm to strike——

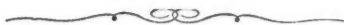
The presto movement had commenced, and an extraordinary circumstance soon made itself apparent to the audience. The violinist was running away with the band. Greatly to the horror of the conductor, the tempo had to be increased until a prestissimo was reached. Still the performer was not satisfied, there seemed no limit to his powers to-night; his fingers literally flew up and down the finger-board; his bow shot to-and-fro with incredible swiftness; and yet the music grew quicker, quicker, until the unhappy conductor, who with difficulty pulled along the toiling band, felt that a fiasco was inevitable.

On, on rushed the fingers and the bow, faster, and faster still; a few of the bandsmen fell off from sheer exhaustion, and stared, horror-

stricken, at the mad violinist. Some of the listeners rose in alarm, and many were only detained, by extreme anxiety, from bursting into loud and frantic applause.

Suddenly, with the loud snap of a string, the spell was broken. The orchestra, unable now to proceed, stopped in utter confusion, and a loud sigh of released suspense went up from thousands of throats. Then the whole mass rose in sudden horror, as the violinist dropped his instrument with a crash upon the platform, stared wildly around, clasped a hand to his side, and, with a strange cry, fell to the ground insensible.

For weeks the great violinist lay between life and death ; then nature reasserted herself, and he recovered. But it was long, very long, ere he could again appear in public ; whilst the weird and mysterious violin never again sent forth its strange and mysterious influence. It had been hopelessly shattered in that last night of its performance, which had well-nigh proved fatal to the world-famed player.



AN ENGLISH GARDEN.

Its red-brick walls are high and old,
Grey flowering grasses wave thereon,
There clings the wallflower's glorious gold,
The sulphur-coloured snapdragon ;
The white and purple lilacs bloom
Against the sun-warmed southern wall,
And from the yew-trees' heights of gloom,
The scarlet berries fall.

Beside the smooth tree-girdled lawn
Ungathered roses bud and blow,
There, when the wind blows from the dawn
Pale petals fall like drifted snow.
No foot falls on that dewy slope,
No hand puts back the trailing briar,
But ghosts walk there—the ghosts of hope,
And memory, and desire.

E. NESBIT.

A DARK DESIGN.

A STORY IN SEVEN CHAPTERS.

BY THE AUTHOR OF "THE HARA DIAMOND."



CHAPTER I.

THE stable clock was striking nine as Major Sulgrave shut the side door of the hall of Langley Prior softly behind him and emerged into the open air.

It was a March evening, wild and wintry, with sudden fierce gusts of wind blowing, as it seemed, first from one point of the compass and then from another, and intermittent stinging showers of ice-cold rain. Here and there a few stars shone wanly through the ragged fleeces of cloud that went scurrying across the sky. The noise made by the wind among the trees in the park smote the ear now and again like the rush and roar of a waterfall.

Major Sulgrave was equipped for the weather in a rough homespun ulster, a thick muffler, and a close-fitting travelling cap, the peak of which was pulled well forward over his eyes.

On quitting the house, instead of keeping to the foot-path, which, although it ran at an angle to the gravelled carriage drive, led direct to one corner of the park, he made his way across the sodden grass and, as much as possible, in the deeper shadow of the trees, as though wishful to avoid being seen or recognised by any of the servants, or others who might chance to be on their way to or from the Hall at that hour of the night. He had left the lamp alight in the library, where he usually sat after dinner, and had stolen out unknown to any one.

And yet there was no valid reason why he should have quitted the house after so furtive a fashion.

He was his own master and accountable to no one for his comings or goings; but there was that in his nature which inclined him to secrecy and craft in all his dealings with his fellows; it was as much a part of him to act in that way as his scheming brain, his ungovernable temper, and his callous heart, were integral parts of him, and could as little be dissociated from him. If, in order to arrive at a given end, two paths, one straight and the other crooked, were equally open to him, he would, without a moment's hesitation, choose the latter.

On this wild March evening when he comes before the reader, if he had considered the point with himself, it would have seemed to him that there could have been no fitter time than the present for quitting the house unknown to every one, and for stealing through

the solitary park as though he were guilty of that in fact of which he was already in intent.

For weeks a certain design had been slowly taking shape in the tortuous recesses of his brain, till now the time seemed right for moving in it—right for seeking the help of the one man in the world, who, as it seemed to him, had been intended by Nature for an accomplice in such a deed as the one he meditated.

A quarter of an hour's sharp walking brought him to the outskirts of Wincaster, a hilly, straggling town of some twelve or fifteen thousand inhabitants, on the edge of the Peak country.

Making his way down the narrow, old-fashioned, main street, which at that hour and in such weather was almost deserted, Major Sulgrave, with the collar of his ulster turned up so as almost completely to hide his features, came before long to the bridge over the little river Spindle, just beyond which was the house of the man he had come to see.

He noted with a certain degree of satisfaction that a light shone through the drawn blinds of the sitting-room, which might be taken as a pretty good proof that Dr. Penrose was at home.

Opening the garden wicket like one familiar with the latch, the Major traversed the narrow cobble-stoned pathway which led to the front door, and lifting the knocker gave what sounded like two slow, cautious knocks—very different from the loud peremptory summons with which he would have announced himself at another time.

Dr. Penrose in person opened the door.

"What! you—Major?" he exclaimed, lifting his shaggy eyebrows in unmistakable surprise as the light from the hall lamp flashed on his visitor. "But don't say a word till you have come inside and stripped off your wet things. I was afraid when I heard your knock that it was a summons from one of my patients, and I can assure you that I felt no desire to quit my own fireside on a night like this."

It may here be remarked that the acquaintance between the two men had its origin in an accident which had befallen Major Sulgrave about three months before the date with which we are now concerned. His horse had stumbled, and thrown him; he had been picked up insensible, and carried into Dr. Penrose's surgery close by. The accident had proved to be sufficiently serious to keep the Major a prisoner to the house for some weeks, during which he and Penrose had naturally seen a good deal of each other, and to what purpose, so far, at least, as the Major was concerned, we shall presently learn.

As the doctor waits in the lighted hall while his visitor relieves himself of his outer wraps, we may endeavour to sketch his portrait with a few light touches.

Although only about thirty years of age, Matthew Penrose looked, at least, a dozen years older. He was very tall and very lean, his face was long and thin, his nose hooked and prominent, his cheeks

sunken and sallow, and his deep-set eyes so clear, and keenly searching, as to cause many people, both among his patients and others, to fidget and feel uncomfortable whenever they were bent full upon them. He was certainly far from being an attractive-looking man, and it only needed that he should let his hair, which at all times had an unkempt and uncared-for look, grow a foot longer than it was, and clothe himself in a flame-coloured robe, to body forth the common conception of a wizard or astrologer of the Middle Ages. To this must be added, that he was abrupt in manner and speech, and indifferent to the point of slovenliness about his dress, so that there was little to wonder at in the fact that, although he had now been in practice at Wincaster for five years, he had made scarcely any headway. Of patients he had no lack, but they were of a kind which bring a man neither fame nor fortune.

In fine, Dr. Penrose was very poor, very ambitious, and very clever, although the latter was a fact which the good people of Wincaster had hitherto failed to recognise.

When the Major had doffed his sodden garments, it might have been seen that he was verging on his fortieth birthday, but he was still as thin, and nearly as active-looking as he had been when a score years younger.

By most people he would have been accounted a fairly handsome man. There was a good deal of military smartness about him, with, it may be, more than a suspicion of military swagger. He had dark close-cropped hair, which was already streaked with gray, and small side-whiskers to match. He had a long straight nose, with expanded nostrils, and a heavy jaw. There was a split in his upper lip, the result of an accident in early life, which his thick moustache could not wholly hide. His small steel-blue eyes had a watchful, coldly calculating expression; but he had a trick, when he chose to exercise it: which, to give him his due, was but seldom: of infusing them with a sort of half-humorous, half-cynical twinkle, which, taken in conjunction with a mellow laugh, and an air of almost too transparent *bonhomie*, deceived many people into setting him down as being one of those easy-going, generous-hearted men who have the reputation of being nobody's enemy but their own. Never did such shallow readers of character make a greater mistake.

"Nothing wrong at the Hall, I hope?" remarked Penrose tentatively as he led the way into his cosy sitting-room.

"No, no—nothing of that kind has brought me here on a night like this," answered the other with a touch of petulance. "The fact is, I've mewed myself up in that mouldy dungeon of a house, till I've got a fit of the blues. It's a sort of life I've not been used to. To-night I felt that I could stand it no longer, that I must either seek out somebody to talk to, or else try the effect of a dose of chloral, which (as I gave you my word, I wouldn't) I have not touched since my accident. And so, here I am."

By this time he was rubbing his chilled hands over the fire.

"And very glad I am that you have come," replied the doctor as he wheeled up a capacious easy-chair opposite his own; "for I too was beginning to feel as dull as ditch-water when you knocked; but having no desire to fall into a state of dumps, I was about to mix myself an antidote in the shape of a glass of toddy. You are just in time to join me, Major. The kettle is on the point of boiling. It won't be either the first or the second time that I've prescribed the same medicine for you."

The other did not reply. To all appearance he had fallen into a brown study, as he sat with his hands resting on his knees, staring intently into the fire. Penrose said no more, but having procured a second tumbler from the sideboard, he proceeded to mix two steaming jorums of grog. That done, he pushed a box of cigars towards his visitor, and having slowly charged a big meerschaum with tobacco, he lighted it and sat down facing the Major. He felt convinced in his own mind that the other's visit had some purpose at the back of it the nature of which he had yet to learn. Now and again he glanced at him out of a corner of his eye, but for some minutes the silence remained unbroken save by a few sputtering drops of rain driven down the wide-mouthed chimney, or by the muttered threatnings of the gale outside, which at times seemed to become almost articulate and then died away again to a troubled whisper.

"Your toddy is getting cold, Major, and losing both strength and bouquet," said the doctor at length. "To my thinking, half-cold grog is but a mawkish kind of tipple."

Thus appealed to, Sulgrave roused himself, or seemed to do so.

For a few moments his eyes rested on the doctor with an expression in them such as the other was utterly at a loss to comprehend, after which he took a long pull at his tumbler and proceeded to light a cigar. Then, with his eyes again bent on the fire, he presently spoke.

"Penrose," he began, "have you any recollection of a certain talk you and I had one day in which you told me how addicted you are to toxicological studies, and favoured me with the details of a number of experiments on the actions of poisons, both mineral and vegetable, which you have conducted from time to time."

"I have not forgotten the occasion you speak of," answered the doctor.

"Supposing, now—merely to put a case, you know—that there was some one whom you were desirous of getting rid of, you would, I assume, experience no insuperable difficulty, providing you had access to the person in question and, more especially, if you were acting as his medical attendant, in carrying out your design in such a way that it would be next to an impossibility for it ever to be brought home to you?"

"Very little difficulty indeed," responded Penrose drily.

The Major emptied his glass in silence, whereupon his host proceeded to refill it as before.

"Penrose, my position is a somewhat peculiar one," resumed Sulgrave presently, without any reference to what had gone before, and again without looking his host in the face. "When my brother died some months ago he left me, as you are doubtless aware, sole guardian to his only child, a delicate, ailing girl three years old. Till she comes of age I am allowed a thousand a year out of the estate, which sum includes the cost of her maintenance and education. Eveline then of course comes in for everything, barring a paltry five hundred a year which is settled on me for life."

"But supposing the young lady should not live to see her twenty-first birthday, what then?"

"In that case I come in for everything. I become the Master of Langley Prior with an income of eight thousand a year."

"Only one ailing child between you and such a fortune! You were quite right in characterising your position as a peculiar one."

The Major's eyes turned and met those of the doctor. For a full minute the two men sat and looked at each other without speaking.

"You say that the child is delicate. Where is she at the present time?" It was Penrose who spoke.

"At Rouen, in charge of my wife; in which hole I have been vegetating for the last three years—or rather, I had been up to the date of Guy's death."

"At Rouen. Hum! An inland French town and, like most such places, not over healthy, I make no doubt," murmured the doctor as he scratched his chin reflectively with one of his long pointed nails.

"Don't you think, now, that her native air—she was born in England, was she not?—might benefit her health, more especially if it could be combined with the ozone of the sea-side?"

"What rigmarole have you got hold of now? Hang me if I see the connection!" growled Sulgrave, turning upon him with an evil glitter in his frosty blue eyes.

Penrose smiled faintly. "You are doubtless acquainted by name, at least, with Scriven Bay, an obscure watering-place about two and a half miles from here?"

The other nodded in sullen fashion.

"Well, as it happens, I have an unmarried sister who keeps a small boarding-house there, which at this time of year is always empty of visitors. Such being the case, what could be easier than for you to bring your niece to England and arrange for her to stay a month or two at the Bay—for the benefit of her health?"

Here he leaned over the table so as to bring his face closer to the Major's, his deep-set eyes gleaming from under his shaggy brows like two keen points of flame.

"My sister would be only too glad to accommodate the little lady, and if, after a time, her health, instead of improving, should deteriorate,

and if, in spite of Drusilla's care and my medicines—for of course you would appoint me to attend her—she should gradually fade out of existence, what possible blame could attach to any one? She would have died from causes which no human skill could have controlled, or would have seemed to do so, and the next heir—meaning yourself—would step quietly into possession, while the world, after wagging its head and murmuring, 'Poor child, what a pity she died so young!' would hasten to congratulate the new Master of Langley Prior. But you don't drink, Major Sulgrave, you don't do justice to my brew," he added, as he finished his own glass at a gulp, and smacked his lips appreciatively.

The Major sank back in his chair with blanched lips and apprehensive eyes. His intention had been to feel his way with Penrose, to sound him, to touch on the subject tentatively, and then to leave it awhile to ferment in the other's mind. But the doctor, with a cold-blooded cynicism which fairly took his visitor's breath away, had leaped at a bound to the conclusion which the Major had only thought to reach slowly and by degrees. And yet, how bold, how simple, how comprehensive, and, above all, how safe seemed the scheme which a few sentences had sufficed him to propound! Doubtless the doctor, who was a poor man, would want his *quid pro quo*; men do not proffer their aid in such schemes for nothing, and the question was at what price he would rate his services, always, of course, supposing that he, the Major, should decide upon calling them into requisition.

It was not till an hour and a half later that Major Sulgrave faced the wind and rain on his way home, by which time the two confederates had arrived at a thorough agreement, and had worked out the various details of their scheme so that it should form a coherent whole without one weak link in it, as it seemed to them, on which suspicion could possibly fasten.

CHAPTER II.

A FORTNIGHT later little Eveline Sulgrave, a pretty, delicate-looking child, reached England in charge of her uncle and a French *bonne*, and after a stay of a couple of days at the Hall, was given into charge of Miss Penrose, a lady some years her brother's senior, but very like him both in appearance and manner, and was by her carried off to Scriven Bay, the *bonne* being sent back home. Her uncle bade the child a hurried farewell, and heaved a great sigh of relief as he watched the brougham which was taking her away drive down the avenue. Had he really seen for the last time, and through his own act, the child whom his dead brother had confided so trustingly to his care? He gave himself a savage shake when the question put itself to him—it was his way of admonishing his conscience—and rang for brandy.

The first act of the drama had passed off without a hitch, why should not the second succeed equally well?

A month passed, and the child's health seemed to improve from day to day. Then a change set in, and she began to fade and to lose her strength by slow and almost imperceptible degrees. Miss Penrose naturally called in the services of her brother, who drove over every day from Wincaster in a hired fly to see his youthful patient. Then, after a time, a letter was written to the Major abroad, apprising him of his niece's illness, a letter such as might be seen by any one. In answer to it he wrote that it would be very inconvenient for him to visit England just then, but that, should his niece become any worse, as to which he was to be kept informed from day to day, he would not fail to do so. A week later found him at Langley Prior in obedience to a summons from Dr. Penrose. Miss Sulgrave was much worse, and her life could not be depended on from hour to hour. The Major arrived late at night, his intention being to drive over to Scriven Bay in the course of the following forenoon; but while at breakfast a message reached him from Penrose informing him that all was over, and that his niece had passed quietly away in the course of the night.

He pushed his breakfast aside and shut himself in his room, pending the doctor's arrival.

"You must come and see her, if it be only for a moment," said the latter to the Major when he reached the Hall. "People will call you unfeeling and I don't know what else, if you fail to do so. Besides, I want you to assure yourself with your own eyes, that she is really dead, and that I am not endeavouring to cozen you out of your money, by stating what is not the fact."

It was with very reluctant footsteps that Harold Sulgrave climbed the stairs which led to the chamber in which lay all that was mortal of the child whose death he and his accomplice had so ruthlessly compassed. Miss Penrose having ushered him into the room, removed the cambric handkerchief which had been spread over the face of the child, and then left him.

One quaking glance sufficed for the Major. There was the sweet face which, do what he might, would not fail to haunt his memory as long as he lived, with death's ineffaceable seal stamped upon it, set in a framework of short golden curls, which to his eyes looked like an aureola. He turned away with a shudder, feeling more sick at heart than he had ever felt before, and made his way down-stairs and out of the house, without a word to any one.

More than once, later on, he could not help asking himself, whether that tall, angular, impassive-looking Miss Penrose had been an accessory, equally with her brother, in the tragedy on which the curtain had recently fallen, or whether she had merely been an unwitting instrument in the hands of a will more unscrupulous than her own. But it was a point as to which he did not care to ask Penrose to enlighten him.

A few days later there was a quiet funeral from Langley Prior. The remains of Eveline Sulgrave, aged three years and nine months,

were laid beside those of her parents, in a vault in the little old church just outside the precincts of the park, where generation after generation of the family at the Hall have found their last resting-place.

CHAPTER III.

TIME passed on, and Major Sulgrave succeeded in due course to the estate of Langley Prior, together with certain other property which, now that his brother's only child was dead, devolved upon him as the heir-at-law.

Before long, he proceeded to take up his residence at Langley Prior, bringing with him his only son, a youth about eight years old, but leaving behind on the Continent, his wife and his stepson; for Mrs. Sulgrave had been a widow of means, when the Major persuaded her into uniting her fortunes with his, a step which she had soon found cause to regret. The marriage had proved a most unhappy one; so much so, that when the Major, after his change of fortune, announced his intention of living in England for the future, the unhappy victim of his tyranny plucked up heart of grace, and refused to accompany him. It may have been that he himself was by no means averse to the separation; in any case as far as was known, he raised no positive objection to it; but none the less was he careful to aim a last and most cruel blow at his wife, by taking young Guy away with him, and thereafter prohibiting communication of any kind between mother and son.

Thus it fell out, that neither Mrs. Sulgrave nor the Major's stepson was ever seen at Langley Prior, but although their names were never mentioned in the Major's hearing, the existence of both was a fact well known to the people of Wincaster and its neighbourhood.

When the separation had lasted seven years, Mrs. Sulgrave died, a notification of her demise appearing in due course in the *Times* and other newspapers.

Although the Major had by no means the most immaculate of reputations, and was universally suspected of being both a bully and a tyrant, the golden fact that he was worth eight thousand a year, was one which could not be gainsaid; in addition to which he was still a passably handsome man and scarcely passed the prime of life. Innumerable, therefore, were the surmises and speculations indulged in by the *quid nuncs*, spinsters, and mothers with marriageable daughters, as to whether the Master of Langley Prior would, or would not tempt fortune again in the matrimonial lottery. But time went on, and the person most concerned made no sign.

Then, when five or six years had gone by, it became bruited abroad that Guy, the son and heir, had become engaged to Lady Mary Langmere, youngest daughter of the Earl of Letchford. In

securing Lady Mary, who was both a beauty and an heiress, the county ungrudgingly recognised the fact that the Major and his son had played their cards in a way which reflected the highest credit on both of them.

But enough for the present of one whose life held a secret which would have caused his own son, had it been whispered in his ear, to shrink from him in loathing and horror. There are others who now claim our attention.

Within four months of the death of the heiress of Langley Prior, Dr. Penrose announced to all whom it concerned, that in consequence of a certain legacy (amount not stated) having accrued to him through the death of a relative, he had decided on quitting Wincaster, and buying a practice in the metropolis.

To London, accordingly, he shortly afterwards removed, his sister having previously left Scriven Bay, and gone nobody seemed to know where. Of the doctor, tidings reached one or other of his old patients from time to time. He was known to be a rising man, one who, by dint of sheer talent and indomitable energy, was slowly but surely forcing his way to the front. As years went on, he began to be spoken of as a specialist of growing reputation in connection with certain obscure forms of brain disease.

* * * * *

In the morning-room of a small but pleasant villa, known as Elderbank, and situated on the outskirts of a little out-of-the-world West-country town, sat two people in deep, but somewhat troubled converse.

They were Dr. Penrose and his sister, who, except that their faces showed a few more lines and creases than of old, and that their hair bore unmistakable traces of the passage of time, looked otherwise hardly at all changed. It may be that the doctor's thin, keen, vulturine features and deep-set eyes gave him a closer likeness to some gaunt and hungry bird of prey, than had been noticeable in his younger days; but that, perhaps, was no more than might be looked for in a man of such marked physiognomy.

"It's a pity, a very great pity, and I'm more annoyed than I care to confess!" exclaimed the doctor, in a tone of extreme vexation.

"If I had only known a year ago what you have told me to-day, if you had only confided to me the least inkling of your intentions and wishes," answered his sister, deprecatingly. "But you never said a word."

"It seemed to me altogether unnecessary to do so till the proper time should have arrived. Your own sense, Drusilla, ought to have told you that my object in establishing you and the girl in this remote place was to keep her from running any such danger as the one into which you have allowed her to walk blindfold, without, as far as I can understand, making a single effort to save her from the consequences of her folly, or, perhaps, I ought rather to say her ignorance."

"As I have already told you, Matthew, the mischief was done

before I was aware of it. After the way the young man behaved on the occasion of the railway accident a month ago (it was entirely due to his efforts that we were rescued as soon as we were from the wrecked carriages), it was only natural that he should call next day to inquire about us. He called again a few days later; after which I saw nothing more of him till the day before yesterday, when he sent in his card and five minutes later startled me as I have seldom been startled by asking my permission to pay his addresses to Evie."

"Like his impudence! They had met in the interim as a matter of course."

"Evie has since confessed as much to me, but I had not the slightest suspicion of anything of the kind."

"A pretty sort of duenna you make! A wandering artist, too, a fellow sprung from nobody knows where, and who has probably not a five-pound note in the world to call his own! Oh, Drusilla, Drusilla!"

"If I had only known! But you have never told me anything," she said again, this time with tears in her eyes. "You have always treated me as the mere nonentity you doubtless consider me to be in your thoughts."

To this her brother's only rejoinder was an impatient "Pish!"

"Besides," resumed Miss Penrose presently, "Mr. Gilmour is by no means as poor a man as you would make him out to be. He confided to me that his last year's income was something over four hundred pounds, and that this year he has reason to believe it will not be less than six hundred."

"Six or twice six, it's all one as far as he is concerned. You referred the fellow to me?"

"I did. I told him that you would be here to-morrow (your letter having led me to believe you would not arrive till then), as also that I have no voice in the matter one way or another."

"And it is your opinion that the girl is fond of him?"

"I am sure of it; and no wonder, for Basil Gilmour is really a very attractive young man, and a thorough gentleman. You must remember, Matthew, that Evie is not like a girl who has mixed much in society, or has had opportunities of comparing one man with another. Having chosen to bury her in a place like this, you can hardly be surprised if she loses her heart to the first agreeable stranger whose acquaintance she makes, more especially when their first meeting takes place under circumstances so uncommon as marked that of Evie and Mr. Gilmour."

"Humph! There may be just a grain of sense in what you say, Drusilla. Still, I hope it's not too late to nip this folly in the bud. As for waiting here till to-morrow with no other object in view than telling Mr. Basil Gilmour a bit of my mind, that is quite out of the question. As I have already told you, the train by which I have settled that we shall travel leaves here about three hours from now. So while you are getting on with whatever packing you may have to

do, I will write Gilmour a note, which will be a much more satisfactory way than the other of giving him his quietus; after which I'll have a quiet talk with Evie, which will, I fancy, cause her to open her eyes to their widest extent. Ah! here she comes up the garden path. Bless me! how bright and healthy the girl looks, and monstrously handsome into the bargain, if an old bachelor may be allowed an opinion on such a matter."

The letter Dr. Penrose proceeded to write to the young painter ran as follows:

"SIR,—Having been given to understand that, presuming on a certain service which you were fortunate enough to be in a position to render my sister, Miss Penrose, and my niece, Miss Eveline Penrose (for which their united thanks would, by most men, have been deemed an ample return), you have induced the latter on more than one occasion to meet you without the sanction or cognizance of her aunt, and further have so far succeeded in working upon her simplicity and ignorance of the world as to persuade her into consenting to your asking permission to become a suitor for her hand—I beg to inform you that the young lady in question will, in the course of a few months, come into a very considerable fortune, and that her friends have very different views with regard to her future from any which can possibly connect themselves with you.

"I trust, therefore: unless you are desirous that my niece's friends and natural guardians should set you down as a mere fortune-hunter, as a man actuated by no motives beyond those of the most mercenary kind: that your good sense will convince you that all relations between yourself and her must cease from this date wholly and for ever.

"It will be quite useless your making any attempt to seek an interview with my niece, as she and her aunt leave here (in my charge) by this evening's train.

"I am sir,

"Your obedient servant,

"MATTHEW PENROSE."

Evie had been into the town to change her book at the library. It were not wise, perhaps, to inquire too curiously whether it was by accident or design that, as she turned her steps homeward, she and Basil Gilmour met face to face. It is enough to state that they did meet, and that Basil, having first possessed himself of her book, turned to go the way that she was going.

"One of the greatest nuisances of living in a little place like Trewella," said Evie, with a saucy glance at her companion, "is that one continually meets the same people whether one wants to or no—more especially when one doesn't want to."

"My dear Evie, happily for me I am one of those obtuse people

who can never take a hint as applying to themselves," retorted Basil ; "consequently all your thinly-veiled sarcasm is thrown away as far as I am concerned."

Evie heaved a sigh.

"Yes ; I ought to have remembered that it's no use trying to hurt a pachyderm with a pea-shooter."

To this Basil's only reply was a smile.

"Do you know," he said presently, "I really feel quite nervous at the thought of having to plead my cause before that formidable uncle of yours."

Evie's face clouded.

"I firmly believe there is no kinder-hearted man breathing than Uncle Matthew," she said ; "but for all that, he has a very sharp tongue and he can be very severe when he thinks the occasion justifies his being so. You may well feel nervous. I tremble to think what he will say to you as soon as he understands the nature of your errand. That he will put you down as being, and will call you to your face, one of the most audacious young men it has ever been his lot to encounter, I do not for a moment doubt. And, so far, he will be quite right, for, as I have more than once told you, your audacity is one of your most marked characteristics. But it is not too late to draw back ; indeed, I should strongly advise you to do so. We have both been foolish ; we have both—— Pray, sir, may I ask what you find to laugh at ?"

She put the question with a fine assumption of indignation, which, however, did not deceive her lover.

"I am laughing at your simplicity in imagining, or pretending to imagine, that this terrible uncle of yours, or, for the matter of that, twenty such as he, would suffice to deter me from saying what I have made up my mind to say."

"Did I not remark that your audacity was one of your most pronounced traits ? One thing is certain : the more I think about the affair, the more sure I feel that he will refuse in the most positive manner to allow you and me to see any more of each other."

"In any case, we shall have paid the old boy the compliment of asking him. Afterwards, if, as you say, he should prove to be like one of the obdurate uncles in Old Comedy, why, in that case——"

"Yes, in that case ?" echoed Evie, as if to fill up her lover's pause.

"I shall have a certain proposition to make to you, but it is one that I will say no more about till after my interview with Uncle Matthew to-morrow."

The messenger, who was the man-of-all-work at Elderbank, to whom Dr. Penrose's letter was entrusted to deliver, put into Basil Gilmour's hands a second epistle, at the same time that he gave him the other. This second note being addressed in a feminine hand, Basil naturally opened first. It proved, as his heart had already divined, to be from Evie Penrose. It was the first time she had written to

him, and he pressed the paper not once, but a dozen times to his lips, before reading a line of it.

"DEAR BASIL"—it ran—"On reaching home, after parting from you, I found that Uncle Matthew had arrived a couple of hours before, although aunt had not expected him till to-morrow. From a remark dropped by Mary, the parlour-maid, I learnt that they had been shut up together in the morning-room for over an hour. As to what passed between them I know nothing, but it is evidently that aunt is greatly distressed, and I am afraid that my uncle's coming bodes no good to you and me. I expect every moment that he will send for me and question me, but, as you know, I have nothing to conceal. Aunt tells me that he is going to write to you, but to what purport I dare not guess, although my heart misgives me strangely.

"And now for an unwelcome surprise. We start for London, uncle, aunt, and I, by the seven o'clock train this evening, and aunt says that she has no idea how long we may be away. The news has come upon me like a thunderclap. Uncle has just sent for me, and I have no time to add more. When shall we see each other again? That is a question impossible to answer, but whether the time be long or short, do not doubt, dear Basil, that I shall remain,

"Always your own,

"EVIE PENROSE.

"P.S.—My uncle's London address is No. 29, Great Rutland St.

After reading this carefully twice over, Basil tore open Dr. Penrose's communication. His face darkened as he read, and he drew a deep breath when he reached the end of it.

"Evie an heiress!" he muttered; "she who told me the other day that she had not a five-pound note in the world to call her own! Has some fairy godmother been waving a golden wand over her? And now, forsooth, I'm to give her up on pain of being branded as a fortune-hunter and I know not what besides! But nothing less than my dismissal from my darling's own lips shall suffice to divide us. Were I to become suddenly rich, should I not make her my wife just the same? And I will not wrong her by doubting that she—anyhow, only from herself will I take my *cong  *."

He put Evie's letter back into its envelope.

"Her note makes no mention of this sudden change of fortune," he went on, "consequently it is evident that at the time of writing she knew nothing about it. There is some mystery here. Well, they start for London by the seven o'clock train; I will make it my business to follow by the mail. By this time to-morrow, Great Rutland Street and I will have become better acquainted."

He was as good as his word. By eleven o'clock next forenoon, he was pacing the flags of Great Rutland Street and reconnoitring No. 29. The district is one which abounds with boarding-houses and furnished

lodgings. In the house opposite No. 29, there was a card in the window announcing that the drawing-room floor was to let. Basil, who was not a young man to hesitate when once his mind was made up, engaged the rooms there and then, paying a month's rent in advance. Then he set himself patiently to watch the doors and windows of Dr. Penrose's domicile.

It would have been weary work had he not been buoyed up with the thought that at any moment he might see Evie come tripping down the steps, or, at the least, catch a glimpse of her face or figure at one of the windows. He wanted to satisfy himself, first of all, that she was really located in the opposite house; after that, it would not be difficult to devise some plan, by means of which he could arrange for an interview with her.

But when four days had gone by without affording him the slightest glimpse of either Evie or her aunt, his patience became exhausted. He had seen Dr. Penrose, or the man he took to be him, pass out and in daily; callers there had been in plenty, both in carriages and on foot; but no sign or token of her whom he was hungering to see. So, on the morning of the fifth day, after the doctor had started on his rounds, Basil crossed over the way, knocked boldly at the door, and asked of the servant who answered his summons, whether either Miss Penrose or Miss Eveline Penrose was at home.

Greatly was he surprised and dismayed on being told that no such ladies lived there, or even were there on a visit. Wheresoever else the doctor might have bestowed them, it was evident that he had not brought them to his own house. Basil had wasted his time and money to no purpose.

It now occurred to him that there might, perhaps, be a letter from Evie, awaiting him at his lodgings in Trewella, which was the only address of his known to her. Accordingly he at once sent off a telegram and had the satisfaction, next morning, of receiving a re-addressed letter which had been waiting a couple of days for him. Well might his watch in Great Rutland Street prove a futile one, seeing that the letter was dated from "Laurel Cottage, Hampstead."

"DEAR BASIL,—Uncle Matthew thought it would be both pleasanter and healthier for aunt and me to take up our quarters at the above address, rather than at his house in Great Rutland Street; consequently here we are. So many strange things have happened during the last few days that I scarcely know whether I'm the same young woman that I was a week ago. At present I will enter into no details, but leave everything to be told you when next we meet, when you must be prepared to be very much astonished indeed. It appears that my uncle's object in bringing me to London at so short a notice was that he might take me to his lawyers in order to obtain my signature to certain documents, as to the nature or contents of which I have only the very vaguest notion. We go back to Trewella, aunt and I,

in the course of two or three days, but only to remain there a short time, as I am given to understand. I am told that the future has many surprises in store for me, but, whatever else may come to pass, it will leave unaltered and unchanged the love of your own,

“EVIE.”

“P.S.—Although my uncle insists that I ought to give you up, I will *never* consent to do so, unless you wish it.”

It would be useless, Basil reflected, to go in search of Laurel Cottage, seeing that, in all probability, Miss Penrose and Evie would have already taken their departure. There were a number of matters that required his attention. He would stay a couple of days longer in town, and then go back to Trewella and at once seek an interview with Evie. But it so fell out, that instead of two or three days only, a fortnight elapsed before Basil found himself again at Trewella. A sprained ankle, the result of a fall, kept him a close prisoner to his rooms for upwards of a week.

CHAPTER IV.

ABOUT nine o'clock in the evening of the day on which Basil Gilmour met with the accident which kept him in London a fortnight longer than he had intended, Major Sulgrave knocked at the door of Dr. Penrose in Great Rutland Street, and, having sent in his name, was presently ushered into the library, where he found the man he had come to see, his only companion being a gaunt, brindled wolf-hound which lay stretched on the rug in front of the empty fireplace.

Time had not dealt kindly with the Major; although his sixtieth birthday was still some years ahead of him, his hair was snow-white, while his face was lined and seamed like that of a man of four-score. The coldly watchful expression with which his steel-blue eyes had once habitually regarded his fellows, as though ever on the look-out to gain some advantage over them, had given place to a curiously furtive, indeed it might almost be called haunted look. To those with a gift for the reading of such signs, his bearing and demeanour gave the impression of a man whose life was being slowly but surely corroded away by the knowledge of some dark secret which he durst not reveal to any one.

But not only was it a secret which he durst not reveal; it was one which, to a certain extent, left him at the mercy of his accomplice. That the latter, as the actual perpetrator of a deed for the commission of which the other had merely paid him a certain price, might be, and indeed was, the more guilty of the two, did not count for much. Dr. Penrose was a man getting well into years. What if some day he were to be seized with a fatal illness, and, in one of those moments of weakness to which men are liable at such times, were to reveal everything!

Then again, there was that tall gaunt sister, that feminine edition of her brother—how much, or how little did she know? and who was to guarantee that her tongue would for ever remain sealed? It was the chill dread of what a day, nay, of what an hour may bring forth, which never altogether left him, and at times held him with a grip which seemed to suffocate him—that gave to the Major's eyes that strangely furtive and haunted look.

Seventeen and a half years had gone by since Major Sulgrave had looked for the last time, as he believed, on his dead niece's face, during which he and the doctor had met but once. Their paths in life lay wide apart, and each of them had only to keep on his own way in order to avoid the other. There had come a day, however, about a month anterior to the time at which we have now arrived, when the Major had sought out the doctor, not exactly of his own accord, but because he had been specifically advised to do so. The fact was that for some time back his health had been anything but what it ought to be. Latterly, symptoms had developed themselves which his ordinary medical attendant, an old-world country practitioner, hardly felt himself competent to deal with; and it was owing to his representations, and not by any wish of his own, that the Major had sought the advice of Penrose, as that of a man who had made a name for himself in dealing with such cases as the one which now submitted itself to his diagnosis.

On that occasion the two had met simply as doctor and patient. No word had been whispered between them, no slightest allusion had been let drop by either with regard to that which doubtless lay heavy on the recollection of both. The Major, after having undergone a careful examination, was sent away re-assured. There was nothing seriously the matter with him, he was told: dependent on his carefully carrying out certain instructions, a couple of months ought to see him his own man again.

And now, here he was in Great Rutland Street again; but to-night his errand was a very different one from that which had taken him there a month before.

"Good evening, Major," said the doctor, rising from his chair as the other entered the room. "After our last interview, I hardly expected to see you here again so soon. There has been no aggravation of symptoms in the interim, I hope? But pray be seated. Down, Bruno!" he added sternly to the hound, from whose throat had issued a deep muffled growl.

"Penrose, the strangest thing has happened to me within the last few hours," began the Major abruptly as he sank into an easy-chair. "I have received a notice of ejectment from a certain firm of lawyers, accompanied by a secondary notice calling upon me to refund seventeen years' rents, together with whatever other moneys may have been received by me during that time from the Langley Prior estates, the plea set up being—what think you?—Nay, if you were to guess for a

year, you would still be wide of the mark!—The preposterous plea, then, now put forward is, that they—the lawyers—are acting on behalf of—well, of a certain person who has the consummate presumption to call herself Eveline Sulgrave, and who claims to be my late brother's daughter! Whereas, with my own eyes I saw the real Eveline Sulgrave, at that time a child, laid out for the grave—you know when and where."

As he finished speaking, he turned his cavernous, bloodshot eyes on the doctor, and was startled to see the expression with which the latter was regarding him. A smile, which was far more than a merely cynical one, curved the doctor's thin lips: it was the smile of a man who has at last got his enemy into a corner from which there is no escape—the smile of the triumphant gladiator over his fallen opponent a moment before he deals him the last fatal thrust.

"You *thought* you saw the child in question laid out for the grave, Major Sulgrave."

"What do you mean?" demanded the other quickly with a sudden blanching of his face.

"What you really saw was not the figure of your dead niece, but a waxen effigy of the child which I had caused to be made by an Italian friend of mine. For once in a way your eyes played you false."

"A waxen effigy which you caused to be made!" gasped Sulgrave. "But for what purpose?"

"Listen, and you shall be enlightened. When first you hinted your infamous proposal to me, my immediate impulse was to denounce you for the unmitigated villain that you were; but then came the reflection that unless I seemed to fall in with your views, the child would still remain in your power, and I knew you too well not to feel assured that you would find some other mode of ridding yourself of her. It was the determination to save her life and, at the same time, carry out a purpose of my own, which caused me to act as I did. The child was carried off by my sister to a remote part of the country, and there brought up under her care, passing as her niece and mine, and not till the other day did she herself know aught to the contrary. She is now of age, and the time has at length come for her to claim the rights which you defrauded her out of so many years ago, believing, when you did so, that you had robbed her of her life as well as her patrimony."

Major Sulgrave lay back in his chair, a helplessly inert lump of humanity. For a moment his eyes crossed fire with those of Penrose, but only to drop the next before the coldly implacable gaze of his new-found enemy. Mentally and physically he reeled, as it were, under the blow which the other had just aimed at him. He flung out his arms for help, but they grasped nothing save empty air.

"And yet you sold yourself to me," his dry lips at length contrived to stammer. "You took my money under a promise to do a certain

thing ; so that, [by your own showing, you are no better than a common swindler."

"Not so. Had I not put a price on my supposed services, you would have become suspicious that, in some way or other, I was hoodwinking you. The bank-notes you gave me from time to time, all of which I insisted on your endorsing with your initials and the dates on which they passed into my hands, are locked up in my safe, where they have lain untouched for years, and to-morrow they shall be given back to you: you doubtless thought, when I left Wincaster and bought a practice in London, that it was with your blood-money I paid for it. It was a very natural conclusion for you to come to. In reality, my means were derived from a legacy left me by a distant relative."

Utterly dazed and confounded, the Major listened like a man in a dream. He had no words at his command wherewith to express a tithe of the feelings which were raging dumbly within him. Ruin, complete and irretrievable, stared him in the face. What had he ever done to this man to make of him an enemy so implacable, so slow of vengeance, but so sure of stroke now that the day of reckoning was here? Not long had he to wait for an answer to the question he thus put to himself.

"I told you just now," resumed Penrose, who in the eyes of the cowering wretch before him seemed to be both judge and executioner in one, "that in acting as I did, I had a certain purpose of my own to accomplish, a certain end to serve. What that was I will now tell you. Go back in memory, Harold Sulgrave, to a summer twenty years ago, while your brother was still alive, when you came to Langley Prior on a visit, and then tell me whether any recollection lingers in your mind of a certain girl, Ann Marsh by name. Ah! I see that you have not quite forgotten her, though doubtless you have striven your hardest to do so. Well; I loved that girl (though the world knew it not), and would have made her my wife, had not you come between us, and deliberately set yourself to accomplish her undoing. You succeeded but too well, as the last act of the tragedy proved. Betrayed and deserted, Ann sought a refuge for all her wrongs in the Upper Mill Pool, while you went on your way, smilingly indifferent. It was then that I swore to be revenged on you, whatsoever the cost to myself might be. After a while the chance came to my hand in a way such as in my wildest dreams I had never anticipated. You gave yourself away to me, and it only rested with me to determine after what fashion I could best work out my scheme of vengeance to the bitter end. In what way I have succeeded in doing so, you have now been told. The girl whom I snatched from the cruel death to which you had doomed her, is of age, and beyond your control. You, who have tasted the sweets of wealth for so many years, will now go back to that poverty and obscurity, the sting of which ate so bitterly into your soul in days

gone by, and which will now seem twice as bitter by contrast. Your son is engaged to be married to a daughter of the Earl of Letchford. Will that wedding take place now? I trow not. Ann Marsh is avenged!"

The Major was roused at last.

"Matthew Penrose," he said with slow, envenomed intensity, and with a murderous, half insane gleam in his eyes, "had I but brought my revolver with me, I would have shot you dead where you sit before me!"

A contemptuous laugh broke from the doctor's lips. "No, Harold Sulgrave, you would have done nothing of the kind," he said. "In the first place, you are an arrant coward; and, in the second, before you could have raised your hand, my faithful Bruno here would have had his fangs in your throat, and after that——" A significant shrug finished the sentence.

CHAPTER V.

BASIL GILMOUR, on alighting from the train at Trewella, at once engaged the only fly the little station could boast of, to take him to Elderbank, so great was his hurry to see Evie again. He had kept his rooms on, and he now drove round by way of them, in order to rid himself of his portmanteau, and, at the same time, notify his return to his landlady.

Every one who has visited Trewella knows that the quaint little town lies low and sheltered on the inland side of a long line of cliffs, broken here and there by combes, or small valleys, the seaward fronts of which have for untold ages stemmed the full force of the Atlantic. Here and there, along the road which wound upward from the valley in which the town is built to the wind-swept plateau above, was to be seen a small villa, or cottage *ornée*, each standing in its own garden, or tiny belt of shrubbery. Of these pleasant domiciles Elderbank was one.

Gilmour alighted at the gate, and paid and dismissed the flyman. His heart beat high with hope and joyful expectancy as his eyes scanned the front of the house in search of the face he loved so well; but only the blank windows stared back at him. "Perhaps she is out—gone into the town, or for an afternoon stroll along the cliffs," he said to himself, a few rapid strides taking him across the lawn to the front door. His hand was on the knocker, when the door was opened from within, and Miss Penrose confronted him, but so changed and aged, that she looked at least a dozen years older than when Gilmour had seen her last.

"You have found her—you have brought me news of her! Is it not so?" she cried, with a pitiful eagerness in her voice, before the young painter had time to say a word.

"Found her! Found whom, Miss Penrose?" he demanded. "I have come in search of Evie; is she not here?"

"Then you do not know—you have not heard?" wailed the spinster. "And I thought you had come, like a good angel, to bring me tidings of her! But come inside, there is no one in the house but myself and Martha."

Hardly knowing whether he was awake or dreaming, but with a sickening dread at his heart, he followed her into the pleasant little parlour, which only on two previous occasions had it been his privilege to enter. Hardly had he crossed the threshold before Miss Penrose turned, and, with a gesture which had in it the touching recognition of a common loss, laid a hand on each of his shoulders.

"Oh, Mr. Gilmour," she cried, "my darling is gone—lost—lost and nowhere to be found!" And with that she burst into a passion of tears.

"Gone!—lost!" exclaimed Basil in a tone of stupefaction. "For Heaven's sake, Miss Penrose, tell me what you mean!"

But just then the poor lady was incapable of another word, her sobs shook her from head to foot; so Basil, taking her gently by the hand, led her to the sofa, and seated himself beside her. What she had to tell him, as soon as she could command herself sufficiently, was to the following purport:

It was now Thursday. On Monday afternoon Evie had left home, taking a book with her, and announcing her intention of going for her favourite walk along the cliffs as far as St. Bridget's Bay and back, going and coming making together a distance of about five miles. Her aunt went with her, as she not infrequently did, as far as the point where the road which led up from the valley joined the foot-path which ran along the summit of the cliffs, and then left her, the girl going on her way alone.

It was a still, slightly overcast September afternoon, and the tide was creeping in with a long, slow, oily swell. St. Bridget's Bay, for which Evie was bound, was well known to Basil. It was formed by a break in the sea frontage of the cliffs, and was backed by a lovely wooded glen, which struck inland for a quarter of a mile or more, and through which, dropping by many a miniature cascade, ran a purling stream of purest water, till it was finally dispersed and lost among the sands of the bay. Here Basil had often come to sketch during the summer just ended, and, above all, here it was he had first whispered in Evie's ear that he loved her!

From the time Miss Penrose and Evie parted on Monday afternoon nothing more had been seen, or was known, of the girl. She had never returned home, and no tidings of her were forthcoming. Both the local constabulary and the mounted county force had been communicated with, and a search party, among the fishermen and others, organised; one section taking the glen and its surroundings, while the other devoted itself to the shore and the bays for miles in

both directions ; but, so far, without the shadow of a result. Well might poor Miss Penrose be half distracted.

Gilmour's distraction was no whit less poignant than that of the spinster, in addition to which he was overborne and weighed down by a sense of his utter helplessness, of his inability, not merely to *do* anything, but even to suggest anything worth acting upon in a conjuncture so strange and unprecedented, which of itself was enough to madden him. If the forces already at work had been able to effect nothing, what likelihood was there that his services, even if he had known in what direction to put them to the proof, would be of the slightest avail ? All his heart within him was crying out to be up and doing, and there was nothing for him to do ! The air of the little room seemed to stifle him.

"You have, of course, communicated with your brother, Miss Penrose ?" he said at length, when the silence was fast becoming intolerable.

"Oh, yes ; I telegraphed to Matthew as soon as ever the office was open on Tuesday morning, but I have had no reply—none whatever. I can't make it out at all, and if—Why, I do believe that is the telegraph boy at the gate !"

And so, indeed, it proved. Dr. Penrose's reply to his sister's message was brief, but to the point :

"Found telegram awaiting my return from special case in country. Will be with you at earliest possible moment."

Miss Penrose brightened visibly. Her faith in her brother and his capabilities was so thorough. She had been so used to rely upon him, and to find that at his touch all her little difficulties and dilemmas vanished as if by magic, that the announcement of his proximate arrival was enough to make her feel as if half her burden were already lifted off her shoulders. If neither the police nor anybody else could succeed in tracing Evie, Matthew would not fail to do so !

But to Basil Gilmour the doctor's message brought no such comfort. Oh, to be compelled to sit there, helpless and inactive, when at that very moment his darling might be—— ! It seemed to him as if his brain must give way.

Moodily he paced the little parlour, his hands buried deep in his pockets, searching vainly in his mind for some ray of light, some beckoning finger to point out the way he should go. But all around him was a blackness as of a dungeon at midnight.

He was alone, Miss Penrose having slipped quietly out of the room some minutes before, when the sudden creaking of the garden-gate cut his sombre reverie as with a knife. His heart gave a great leap. What if it were Evie come back ! A couple of strides took him to the window.

No, there was no Evie there, but, instead, three people, all strangers to him. The one who led the way towards the front door

was a man in uniform ; following him came a middle-aged, careworn woman ; while the rear was brought up by a shambling, vacant-looking youth of eighteen or twenty. Gilmour's heart sank, but only to rise with a bound a moment later. "Although Evie herself has not come back," something whispered to him, "may not these people have brought tidings of her?"

And such, in fact, proved to be the case, when the party of three had been ushered by Miss Penrose into the sitting-room.

The man in uniform was none other than Superintendent Fosdyke, chief of the Trewella police ; the woman, a person in a very humble way of life, was known among her neighbours as the Widow Scarbin ; while the youth was her son, Tony. The story that was now unfolded to the wondering ears of Miss Penrose and Gilmour, with Fosdyke for its principal mouthpiece, was, indeed, a singular one. But before entering on it, it may be as well to devote a few words to Tony Scarbin.

That Tony was not "all there," as the phrase goes—in other words, that he was only half-witted—everybody that knew him was pretty well agreed. In point of fact, he was one of those strange compounds of simplicity and cunning, which puzzle those who know them best to say where one ends and the other begins.

But Tony had a further claim on the forbearance and compassion of his fellows : he was a born mute. As with others so situated, he had gradually learnt or had been taught to make known his wants and wishes, and to give expression to his very limited range of ideas, by means of what is commonly known as the deaf-and-dumb alphabet ; that is to say, he made use of his fingers instead of his tongue, in communicating with the few people to whom his language of signs was not a sealed mystery ; among those few, fortunately for Tony, being his mother.

Tony filled the post of messenger and errand-runner in chief to the good folk of Trewella. Not only did he know everybody, young and old, in the town, but there was not a sheep-path or trackway across the moors for miles around with which he was not acquainted.

Thus it fell out that when lawyer Escombe found himself in need of a messenger to carry a letter to Findorn Grange, fifteen miles across the hills, he naturally sent for Tony Scarbin.

It was on Monday afternoon that Tony set out on his errand. He was to stay over-night at his destination, and return with an answer on the morrow. As it happened, however, the answer was not forthcoming till a couple of days later, during which time Tony was fed and lodged at the Grange, so that not till early on Thursday afternoon did he get back to Trewella.

He had delivered the return letter into the lawyer's hands, had been liberally paid, and was partaking of an early tea with his mother, when the news with which all Trewella was ringing was told him—the news of the disappearance of Miss Eveline Penrose of Elderbank.

As a matter of course, Tony knew Eveline ; but he not merely knew her, he worshipped her. Her beauty appealed to some dim and heretofore unawakened sense within him, arousing vague delicious feelings and emotions, which but for her might have lain dormant for ever. Whenever he encountered Eveline, it was as though some strange beautiful bird awoke in his heart and began to flutter its wings and beat against the bars of its cage in a vain endeavour to escape, and it was not till hours afterwards, that poor Tony's customary stolid composure would come back to him.

Many, too, were the sixpences which Eveline had given him out of sheer compassion, and without asking any service in return, although he would gladly have gone through fire and water to serve her. But not one kindness she had ever done the poor "natural" was by him forgotten.

Mrs. Scarbin was retailing the news to her son simply as news, and because it happened to be the subject uppermost in her thoughts ; but hardly had his slow perception taken in the fact that Miss Eveline had been missing since Monday and could nowhere be found, before he started excitedly to his feet, and his fingers began to work at such a rate, that even Mrs. Scarbin's practised eyes could with difficulty follow them. He could tell something about Miss Eveline ; he had seen her on Monday afternoon after leaving Trewella.

Ten minutes later Mrs. Scarbin put on her bonnet, and bidding her son follow her, took her way to the police-station ; as a result of which step (on her part, Superintendent Fosdyke, the widow, and Tony, now found themselves at Elderbank.

What the chief constable, as Tony's mouthpiece, had to tell, was at once strange and disquieting.

After leaving Trewella on Monday afternoon, Tony's road lay for about three miles along the crown of the cliff, after which he would have to strike inland, and make the best of his way across country to his destination.

When he had got as far as the head of the thickly-wooded combe which led down to St. Bridget's Bay, he sat down, as he told his mother, to rest awhile ; but according to his own confession later on, it was less with the view of resting, than of snatching "a fearful joy." The fact was that, early in the day, he had been on an errand for Mrs. Tubbs, the tobacconist, who had rewarded him with a couple of cheap cigars, and it was in order to smoke one of these in secret, that Tony found a seat for himself under a clump of brushwood at the head of the glen. It was his first cigar, and the effect was scarcely such as he had anticipated. For a time, indeed, mundane matters interested him not at all.

When at length he was able to open his eyes and sit up and look about him, the first thing he saw was Miss Eveline Penrose coming in leisurely fashion along the cliffs in the direction of the combe, carrying a book in one hand, and her sunshade in the other.

Then he became aware that, following the same line of footpath, but at a distance of about a quarter of a mile, was another female whom he at once recognised as a stranger he had several times seen during the last few days, either in or about the town, and who, as it was afterwards found, had hired a lodging for a week in the cottage of Michael Annis, a retired master mariner, which partly overlooked the grounds of Elderbank.

Tony sat without stirring till Miss Penrose, having followed the footpath to the edge of the combe, but at a point some distance from where he lay *perdu*, dipped swiftly down with it and, a moment later, was lost to view among the thick foliage below.

Tony was about to rise and go on his way, when his attention was arrested by a singular action on the part of the woman who had been following Miss Penrose. Scarcely had Evie disappeared before she came to a halt, and after gazing around her on every side as though to satisfy herself that no one was in sight, she turned her face seaward and drawing as near the edge of the cliff as it was safe to venture, produced from some pocket, what looked like a big white handkerchief, and waved it several times above her head, as if signalling to some one below. That done, she sat down on the short grass, and took no share in anything that followed.

Not only was Tony's curiosity aroused, some instinct seemed to warn him that danger threatened his darling Miss Penrose. Every tree and bush in the combe was known to him, he could have found his way to any given point of it on the darkest night. What he did now was to part the underwood carefully, and make his way forward as stealthily as a hunter on the trail, till he had reached a certain coign of vantage whence, himself unseen, he had an unimpeded view of the sands and the bay beyond.

Even Tony's dull brain felt a shock of surprise when, from his hiding-place, he beheld a yawl at anchor in lonely St. Bridget's Bay; no vessel, big or little, to his knowledge, having ever anchored there before. But scarcely had this strange fact time to impress itself on his mental retina, before a dingy, with two men in it, put off from the yawl, leaving a third man on board. Three minutes later the dingy was beached on the sands and the men stepped ashore.

CHAPTER VI.

WHAT had become of Miss Eveline Penrose? and was the coming ashore of the two men in any way connected with her presence in the combe? Such, or such like, were the questions Tony put to himself after his broken, inarticulate fashion. Had it not been for a vague dread of something happening to her, he would have gone on his way without a further thought for the yawl and its crew.

About three parts of the way down was the loveliest nook in the whole combe.

Here, under the shade of a silver birch, a rustic seat had been placed for the behoof of tired wayfarers and others, and here it seemed to Tony most likely that Miss Eveline would be found. Five minutes later he had made his way to another thick clump of undergrowth on the opposite side of the combe and nearly fronting the rustic seat.

Yes, there she sat, her book and sunshade beside her; and there, also, were the two men from the yawl, one of whom was at that moment addressing her, while the other stood in a respectful attitude a little distance away. Presently the one who was talking, who wore a gold band round his peaked cap and was evidently a gentleman, drew a paper from his pocket and, with a little bow, handed it to Miss Eveline.

As soon as she had read it she rose quickly to her feet and pressed one hand to her head like one doubtful and perplexed. Then the man spoke to her again, pointing at the same time to the yawl. Then Miss Eveline took a few steps in the direction indicated, but presently came to a halt as if her mind were not finally made up.

Once more the man spoke to her, this time with added emphasis and more gesticulation than he had employed before. Apparently, what he now said served to convince her. She seemed to hesitate no longer, but without once looking back, walked down to the bay and was assisted into the dingy, the two men following her. Before many minutes had passed, the yawl, her one sail set to catch whatever air there was, was forging slowly out of St. Bridget's Bay, having Miss Eveline aboard her.

Then Tony Scarbin, having seen all there was to see, turned his face inland and went his way.

Miss Penrose and Gilmour stared at each other in amazement and dismay, when chief-constable Fosdyke had brought his narrative to an end, which Tony had not failed to punctuate, as it were, at frequent intervals with emphatic nods of his head.

"What we should like to find out," resumed Fosdyke presently, "is the name and address of the gent with the gold-laced cap. I suppose now, ma'am, you can't even give a guess as to his identity?"

Miss Penrose shook her head pathetically. She had never been good at guessing anything, and just now, as she told herself, her brains were all in a muddle.

"If we could get an accurate description of the man, it might help us materially," went on the chief constable; "but I suppose it's hopeless to look for anything of the kind from our friend Tony."

The widow Scarbin pricked up her ears.

"There's more in Tony than most folk think for," she said. "Just let me understand clearly what you want, and then maybe——"

In a few words Fosdyke told her how the case stood.

"If Tony ain't good at describing folk in one way, he's rare and clever in another. You just get me a bit of lead pencil and a sheet of paper, and you shall see." The required articles were quick^y forthcoming. Turning to her son, the widow said, "Tony, Mr. Fosdyke wants a likeness of the gent with the gold lace round his cap who gave the paper to the young lady to read."

A flash of keen intelligence, which to Gilmour was nothing less than startling, leapt into the "natural's" eyes. It was as though two lamps had been suddenly lighted in the windows of a darkened room. Taking the pencil and paper, Tony, with a few bold incisive touches, proceeded to fill in the features of the likeness one by one. At the end of two minutes he had put in the last stroke; then he thrust the paper across the table to Fosdyke.

That functionary took up the drawing, glanced at it and shook his head; it awoke no chord in his memory. Then he passed it on to Miss Penrose, whose spectacles were already astride her nose. Her eyes and Gilmour's took in the drawing at the same moment, and at the same moment a like exclamation broke from the lips of each: "Major Sulgrave!"

Then they started apart and stared at each other in blank amazement. Gilmour was the first to recover himself.

"Pardon the question, dear Miss Penrose," he said, "but may I ask whether *you* are acquainted with Major Sulgrave?"

"Am I not!" she exclaimed with a compression of her thin lips. "Not that I ever set eyes on him but once, and that seventeen long years ago. But that once was enough for a lifetime." Then, in French, she added: "He is Eveline's uncle—her father's brother. When she was three years old he tried to compass her death, and would have done so had not my brother rescued her from his hands. And you, Mr. Gilmour, what do you know of this *scélérat*?"

Never in his life had Gilmour been so dumfounded. Sulgrave Eveline's uncle! Not even Tony was more helplessly mute than he for the next few moments. Then, with a great effort, he pulled himself together and, also speaking in French, said: "Major Sulgrave is my stepfather, and the villain who broke my dear mother's heart. If there is one man in the world I hate and abhor, he is that man!"

"And to think that my darling Evie has fallen into his hands?" wailed Miss Penrose, reverting to her native language. "Remembering what he would have done to her years ago, what may he not do to her now? Oh! Mr. Gilmour, what is to be done?—what *is* to be done?"

But for the moment Gilmour did not reply; indeed, it seemed doubtful whether he heard her. He was groping in the dim recesses of his memory after an elusive recollection which for a single instant had flashed itself upon him, only to escape him the next.

Mr. Fosdyke was again eyeing Tony's sketch. "Ah," he muttered

to himself, "I suppose they recognised the fellow by that gash in his upper lip. But I should imagine the likeness to be a good one in other ways. I had no notion Master Tony was half so clever."

Gilmour lifted his head and the perplexed look vanished from his face. "Does any one here know whether there is a place, or building known as St. Ninian's Tower in this part of the country?" he asked.

Although the question was a general one, Fosdyke apparently took it as being addressed directly to him. "I have never, to my knowledge, heard the name before," he said with a shake of his head. "But it must be borne in mind that I've only known this part of the country for a matter of eighteen months, since I came here fresh from Exeter."

Meanwhile Tony had touched his mother's elbow, and his fingers were now talking away to her at a rapid rate. Presently Mrs. Scarbin said, "My boy tells me that he knows St. Ninian's Tower. It's some sixteen or eighteen miles from here across the moors, and stands all by itself close to the sea."

"Good!" said Gilmour. "Now, Tony, do you think that if I were to hire a horse and trap and take you with me, you could guide me the nearest way to St. Ninian's?"

Tony's answer was three affirmative nods of his overgrown head.

"Good!" said Gilmour for the second time. Then he turned to Fosdyke. "Both Miss Penrose and I have recognised the person in whose company Miss Eveline Penrose went away in the yawl. His name is Major Sulgrave, and he is, or used to be, the owner of the building—little more, I believe, than a ruin—known as St. Ninian's Tower. Now, I think it most likely it was to that place that the young lady was taken, at least in the first instance, although I confess myself wholly at a loss to know by what means she was induced to go. What, then, I intend to do is to hire a horse and trap and set out for St. Ninian's with the least possible delay, taking Tony to show me the way; and if you can spare one of your men to accompany me—for it is impossible to say what eventualities may arise—I shall esteem it a favour."

"Give me half-an-hour to make my arrangements, and I will go with you myself," was Fosdyke's prompt rejoinder.

It was already dusk when the three men started. Gilmour drove and had Tony—to whom he had lent an old travelling ulster—on the box seat beside him to point out the road. The back seat was occupied by Fosdyke, who had discarded his uniform for a plain suit of clothes. Gilmour's last words before quitting Elderbank were a promise to its mistress to send back Tony with news as soon as he had any to send. Needless to say, a silent but fervid prayer for his success followed him on his way.

Then one slow hour after another wore itself to an end till ten o'clock had come and gone. Miss Penrose was on the point of

sending Martha to the railway station to ascertain whether there would be another train from London before morning, when, for the second time that day, the solitary station fly drew up at the gate of Elderbank. Never had the sight of her brother been so welcome to her as at that moment.

Miss Penrose knew of old that Matthew had scant patience with the usual feminine style of narration, and the story she had to unfold was told with laudable brevity. "That villain Sulgrave has a hand in this!" exclaimed the doctor even before any mention had been made of what Tony had been a witness of in the combe.

Penrose drew a long breath when at length his sister came to an end. "And do you mean to say," he demanded, "that this artist fellow who is running after Eveline is Harold Sulgrave's stepson?"

"Such is what he avows himself to be."

"Wonders will never cease! That, however, at present is a matter of small moment. What is of infinitely greater consequence is that Major Sulgrave is at the bottom of the girl's abduction, for that it is nothing less than an abduction I cannot doubt. But there is one sinister feature of the affair of which, as yet, no one but myself knows anything."

He got up from his seat and began to pace the little room with his hands behind his back, even as Gilmour had paced it several hours before. His sister, who knew his moods, refrained from speaking. She could see that, in his restrained and undemonstrative way, he was deeply moved.

Suddenly he stopped in front of her and, without removing his hands from behind him, said: "Drusilla, did I ever mention to you that Sulgrave called upon me in London one day about a couple of months ago?"

"No, Matthew, you never spoke of it. If you had, I should have remembered."

"Well, he *did* call upon me. Came to consult me about his health, having been recommended to do so by his own medical man. I made a careful examination of him, got his answers to a number of questions I put to him, and dismissed him with the assurance that there was nothing seriously the matter with him. Drusilla, I told him a lie—told it him of set purpose! My examination of Sulgrave revealed to me undoubted signs of incipient brain disease of a serious kind; such, in point of fact, as would be not unlikely, before the lapse of any long time, to develop into an acute form of mania, not improbably complicated with homicidal tendencies. And this is the man, Drusilla, who has got our poor girl into his clutches!"

His voice broke and he turned abruptly away. Never had his sister seen him so profoundly moved.

As the full import of his words, which at first she had failed to realise, made itself clear to her, horror and dread unspeakable kept her dumb. To the fear of she knew not what, which had held her in

its grip before, a veritable nightmare was now superadded. Then, in a little while, tears came to her relief, as they had come so often in the course of the last few days. But she wept silently, knowing how distasteful such displays were to her brother. He, on his part, had resumed his slow monotonous pacing to and fro.

"Oh, Matthew, what is to be done?" asked the poor lady at length, to whom any long space of silence was always irksome.

"Nothing *can* be done—nothing whatever till morning. If you want to occupy your mind, pray for speedy news and good news." Presently he added: "The most sensible thing for us to do is to go to bed and get as much rest as possible, for we know not what we may be called upon to go through to-morrow. So, if you will give me my candlestick——"

It has already been told how, when Major Sulgrave took up his permanent abode at Langley Prior, he left his wife and stepson behind on the Continent, Mrs. Sulgrave, indeed, having refused to live under the same roof with him any longer. He had long before dissipated the fortune she had brought him, all except an income of a hundred and fifty pounds a year, the capital of which he was unable to touch.

This he now grudgingly supplemented with an equivalent sum, paid quarterly, which was the utmost he would allow her out of his rent-roll of eight thousand a year. The double income, however, being enough for mother and son to subsist on in tolerable comfort, Sulgrave never saw his wife again. When word that she was dying reached Langley Prior, he was from home, and he only reached Rouen in time to follow her body to the grave. Basil, at that time a high-spirited youth of eighteen, with a heart embittered by a knowledge of his mother's wrongs, wholly declined having anything further to do with his step-father, who, on his part, was probably not sorry to have finally done with one whom he had always regarded as a thorn in his side. Basil had an aunt living in London who offered him a home, and to her he went. He and the Major parted at Mrs. Sulgrave's graveside and had never met since.

But when Basil recognised the original of Tony's pencil sketch, which he did the instant he set eyes on it, and when with such recognitions he coupled the astounding fact just revealed to him that the Major was Evie's uncle, and that she herself was the little heiress about whose (supposed) death he had often heard his mother talk; and when, in addition, another significant circumstance stared him in the face, that it was with Sulgrave Evie had gone away in the yawl;—when all these things began to piece themselves mentally together, there came over him a vague recollection of having heard his mother speak of a solitary tower, overlooking the sea, situated, too, in that part of the country, as being the property of the Major, and a place to which he generally betook himself for a few weeks' fishing in the course of each summer.

Following up the train of thought thus happily struck, he presently called to mind the fact that the place in question was known as St. Ninian's Tower, as also that his mother had stayed there for a week in the course of the summer but one following her marriage.

But when Basil had got thus far, there came like a flash the question which fixed him with such instant resolution: Might not St. Ninian's Tower be the spot to which Major Sulgrave had carried off his niece?

St. Ninian's Tower, as it was called, although nobody seemed to know why, was a rudely-built hexagonal structure with no architectural pretensions of any kind. Of the date of its erection, and by whom and for what purpose it had been built, there seemed to be no authentic information forthcoming. It is enough to state that it had formerly belonged to the Bolderos, and together with a small old-fashioned farmhouse which stood no great distance from it, and about forty acres of poorish land, had come to Major Sulgrave by inheritance through his mother.

The manor house in the valley a mile or more away, untenanted for years and now fast falling into disrepair, had been the home of the Bolderos for several generations. They and the Arkenshaws had been the two chief families in that part of the county, each having its own vault under the little roofless church of St. Ninian's, which stood within a bowshot of the Tower. No services had been held in the church within the memory of man, save those connected with the funeral of one or other members of the families in question.

In a tiny cottage just beyond the precincts of the ancient burying-ground dwelt all alone a cripple, Barney Groome by name, whose duty was that of custodian of what remained of the church, but more especially of the vaults below it wherein slept so many dead and gone Bolderos and Arkenshaws. Of the former family the only one of the name now living was a maiden lady of eighty, who for the last half century had made her home at Bath.

The Tower, its age notwithstanding, was by no means in a ruinous condition, but comprised three rooms, one above the other, of which the two upper ones, with their panelling of black oak, were still in a fair state of preservation.

As for the ground floor room, it had long been used by the people at the farm as a storage place for fuel and all sorts of lumber which had no recognised place of their own. Access to the rooms above was obtained by means of a couple of rude wooden staircases. Higher still was the leaded roof of the Tower which could only be reached through a trap-door. The two oak-panelled rooms, each of which was lighted by three or four narrow glazed openings high up in the wall, scarcely bigger than loopholes, were fitted up with a few plain articles of furniture and were kept solely for Major Sulgrave's use when he stayed at the Tower on the occasion of his fishing expeditions.

Finally, it may be mentioned that the farmhouse was tenanted by a man named Amos Gribble, together with his wife, his son and one serving woman.

CHAPTER VII.

THE nearest way to St. Ninian's from Trewella was across the moors, but the road was little better than a sheep-track, and was one which no kind of conveyance could have traversed, unless it were a South African trek-waggon drawn by a team of bullocks.

As a consequence, the road which Gilmour and his companions were obliged to take led them a long way inland and lengthened the distance between the two points by several miles. The church clock was striking ten as they reached the little hamlet of Barnslade. Here, by means of sundry signs and gestures, Tony intimated to Gilmour that they should put up the horse and trap and do the remainder of their journey on foot, a suggestion which the latter at once proceeded to carry into effect.

Horse and vehicle were left in charge of the ostler at the Red Lion, from whom Gilmour ascertained that St. Ninian's was only a mile and a half farther on.

Before long the road began to dip gently down towards the sea, and then presently the faint dull booming of the incoming tide broke the quietude of the night. In silence they walked on till, at a turn of the road, they came suddenly on the Tower of St. Ninian where it loomed darkly against the starlit sky.

Gilmour's heart leaped up at sight of it; fresh life seemed poured into his veins. Leaving his companions at the corner of the lane to await his return, he went on a reconnoitring expedition which took him the circuit of the Tower. Black and silent it stood, with no single ray of light, or rather token of human tenancy visible. The heavy oaken door which gave access to it was securely fastened by means of a huge padlock.

By this time all the young man's elation had died out of him. Could it be possible that the Major had not brought Eveline to the Tower at all? or was it merely that he, Basil, had come too late, and that she had been bestowed elsewhere? Miss Penrose's sinister avowal that the Major had tried to compass Evie's death when a child kept ringing in his ears. He shuddered to think what might have happened to her between Monday and now.

But not for a moment did he dream of going back to Trewella without some certain tidings of one kind or another.

He had spied a light shining through a chink in the shutters of one of the ground-floor windows of the farm, which might be taken as a proof that all its inmates had not yet retired for the night, and his mind was at once made up what to do. After a few words with Fosdyke, who, together with Tony, still kept in the background, he walked up to the farmhouse door, and knocked boldly.

Apparently his summons had the effect of startling the inmates. By pressing his ear to the door, he could just make out, that a low muttered conversation was being carried on inside, which, however, presently died into silence.

Then Gilmour knocked again, louder than before, and a minute later footsteps came to the door, which was now unbolted and opened, but only as far as the chain, which still held it, would allow of. Thus framed, what Gilmour saw, was the face and form of a woman verging on middle age, who carried a lighted candle in one hand which she shielded from the draught with the other. It was a hard, almost repulsive-looking face, with a net-work of wrinkles at the corners of the eyes, and a down-drawing of the corners of the mouth as of one whose life was one long grumble and complaint.

The woman peered out at Gilmour with what seemed to him like a mixture of distrust and defiance.

"I have called to see Major Sulgrave on a very special matter," began Basil. "Can you tell me whether he is at home?"

The woman's start at the mention of the Major's name did not escape the young painter.

"Why have you come here to ask for Major Sulgrave? This is not his home."

"I am quite aware of that, but I am also aware that he is or has been quite lately staying here."

"I've no call to answer any questions about Major Sulgrave—unless——"

Here her eyes seemed again to take in the young man from head to foot.

"Unless you know something about the person who puts the questions," remarked Basil blandly. "Just so. One should never encourage idle impertinence. Allow me, therefore, to inform you that my name is Basil Gilmour" (here is my card), "and that I am Major Sulgrave's step-son—that is to say, he married my mother, and that, consequently, he and I are near relatives."

Some of the suspicion seemed at once to die out of the woman's face. "Oh! if you are a relation of the Major, that makes a lot of difference, and there can be no harm in my telling you that he has gone fishing."

"In the yawl," interpolated Basil as a guess.

"Yes, in the yawl," responded the woman with a nod. "My husband and son are with him, and goodness only knows at what hour of the night, or morning, they will get back."

"In that case there's no help for it, and I must put off seeing him till to-morrow. If, now, I were to call about nine in the morning—or would that be too early?"

"It all depends what time the yawl gets back. The Major might or might not be up by that time. You would have to take your chance."

Thereupon Basil thanked the woman, bade her good night, and went his way.

Having rejoined Fosdyke, the two held a brief consultation, as a result of which, it was decided that they should at once retrace their way to the inn at Barnslade, that a fresh horse should be obtained, and that Tony should then drive back to Elderbank, taking with him a note written by Basil informing Dr. Penrose—who, he calculated, would be sure to reach Trewella by the last train—of what he had thus far discovered; to wit, that Major Sulgrave was quartered at the Tower, and, further, that it was the writer's intention to seek an interview with him at an early hour on the morrow.

This note, he did not doubt, would bring the doctor back with Tony without an hour's delay.

Thus reinforced, they ought to be able, Penrose, Fosdyke, and himself, to force Sulgrave into a corner, from which his only chance of escape would be by revealing what had become of Eveline. They had proof positive that she had gone away with him in the yawl on Monday, and should he now refuse to disclose her whereabouts, it seemed to Basil that their next step ought to be to lay an information before the nearest magistrate and obtain a search warrant, which Fosdyke, as a police official, would be able to carry into effect there and then.

Such was the plan now agreed on between the two men, and one which they would doubtless have proceeded to put into operation, had not something happened at this juncture which, in the result, served to upset all their proposed arrangements and led up to a *denouement* of the strangest and most unexpected kind.

It was Tony who, by nudging the superintendent, first drew attention to what at once concentrated on itself the eyes of all three.

What they saw was a speck of yellow light some distance away from where they were standing, which, after moving in a strangely irregular up-and-down fashion across a small space of darkness, presently came to a point where it remained stationary. The night was still and windless, and the light, whether that of a candle or a lamp, seemed to burn without the faintest flicker.

Fosdyke's detective instincts at once came into play. After a whisper to the others, he stole quietly forward, keeping carefully to the grass-grown borders of the narrow country road. A few seconds later Basil and Tony followed in his footsteps.

The sight they came upon was in no wise a startling one. Indeed, it could hardly have been termed other than commonplace had not the spot been such as it was and the hour so close on midnight, which, taken together, lent the scene a certain element of weirdness. What they beheld was a deformed man—one of his legs was shorter than the other, and a crutch rested against the wall close by—who was gathering together a bundle of firewood under a small wooden shed or lean-to, the tin oil-lamp he had brought with him meanwhile resting

on a bench close by and serving to bring the man's features into prominent relief. He was, in fact, none other than Barney Groome, the custodian of the church of St. Ninian, or of what was left of it, and of the vaults below.

"I seem to know that man's face," whispered Basil to Fosdyke, although unable for the moment to call to mind where he had seen it before.

All unwitting that three pairs of eyes were watching him, Barney Groome presently knotted the cord round his bundle of wood, and taking it and the lamp in one hand, and possessing himself of his crutch with the other, turned to go back to his cottage. Meanwhile Fosdyke had whispered to Basil: "If you know him, why not speak to him? He may be able to tell us something that will prove of use to us."

Accordingly Basil stepped a few paces forward and gave a preliminary cough, which so startled Barney that he dropped his bundle of wood, and very nearly his lamp into the bargain. "Heaven bless us! who's there?" he exclaimed in a quavering voice.

Then Basil went closer, till the light from the lamp shone full on him. "If I mistake not, you and I have met before," he said. "Were you not in the Grimthorpe railway accident?"

Barney peered up into the other's face. "Ah, now, sir, I recognise you," he said. "You are the gent that worked so hard to rescue me and others from the wreck of the train. It was you that brought me round with brandy from your own flask when I had fainted; and it was you that sent me this beautiful new crutch all the way from London, my other one having been smashed in the accident. (It was a mercy I wasn't smashed at the same time!) I've not forgotten your kindness, sir—no, nor ever shall forget it. But what brings you to a place like this, and at this time o' night, if I may make so bold as to ask?"

"I am here to call upon Major Sulgrave, but I find he's gone out for a night's fishing."

"To call upon the Major?" said Barney in a dubious tone; "he's a queer customer to have aught to do with, is the Major."

"I understand his present visit to the Tower has lasted for some time. Can you tell me how long it is since you first set eyes on him?"

"Close on a fortnight ago."

"I suppose he goes out fishing a good deal?"

"Oh yes; he, and Amos Gribble, and the lad Joe set off most afternoons when the weather's at all likely, and as often as not don't get back till early morning."

"I suppose you can't tell me for certain whether or no the Major has a young lady staying with him at the Tower?" Basil's heart beat faster than usual as he put the question.

"What I *can* tell you as a fact is, that in the dusk of evening on

Monday last, a female—but whether young or old it was too dark for me to see—came ashore from the yawl, and walked with the Major up to the Gribbles' house."

"Yes—yes—and have you seen her since? Is she there now?"

"That was the first and last glimpse I had of her. I have seen no signs of her since."

"But might she not have been shut up in the Tower all this time without your being a bit the wiser?"

"If it comes to that, there might be half-a-dozen folk shut up in the Tower without my knowing aught about it."

Basil turned away. The information imparted by Groome was of the utmost importance. It brought home Eveline's abduction to Sulgrave even more irrefutably than before. Surely no magistrate would refuse to issue a search warrant in the face of such evidence as Dr. Penrose would now be in a position to lay before him! Tony must start for Trewella with the least possible delay.

All this passed through his mind in the course of a few seconds. Without being aware of it, he had turned, and was walking by Barney's side in the direction of the cottage, when an exclamation from his companion recalled him to time and place with a start.

"Great mercy!" exclaimed the cripple, coming to a sudden halt and pointing with his crutch. "Whatever's amiss at the Tower? Look!—look! Why, I do believe it's on fire."

At this juncture Fosdyke and Tony emerged from the background into the circle of light which radiated from Barney's lamp. The cripple accepted them without question as being companions of Gilmour. For a space of several seconds they all stood staring at the Tower like men suddenly turned to stone. The narrow windows of the ground floor room, unlike those of the upper stories, were unglazed. One of them now shone out with a dusky red glare, and it was the sight of this which had caused Barney to sound the note of alarm; while from the other, even as they were looking on, dimly discernible by the starlight, was unfurled a pennon of dense white smoke.

Basil's first attempt to speak resulted in a choking sob. Then setting his teeth hard and clenching his hands, he drew a deep breath.

"Follow me!" he exclaimed hoarsely, an instant later, and with that he darted away from the others like an arrow from a bow.

In no time, as it seemed to those left behind, they heard him knocking furiously at the farmhouse door, and calling aloud:

"Fire! fire! Help! help!"

Then a light became visible in one of the upper windows, and just as Fosdyke and Tony reached the door, it was opened from within and the white faces of two women, each of whom had thrown a shawl hurriedly over her shoulders, and one of whom carried a lighted candle, gave back stare for stare to the faces outside.

"Fire! Who called out fire?" demanded one of them fiercely of Basil. "What do you mean by frightening folk in this way?"

It was the same woman with whom he had spoken before.

"It's the Tower that's on fire—the Tower!" he cried, with a stamp of his foot. "And if——"

"The Tower!" broke from both the women.

It was more a scream of terror than an exclamation.

"Yes, Mrs. Gribble, that is so. The bottom room is all in flames."

It was Barney who now spoke. He had come limping up at his best pace after the others.

"O Heaven! and *she* locked up in there!" burst out Mrs. Gribble.

She had been white before, but now her lips turned blue and her eyes seemed as if they would start from her head.

"Locked up in the Tower!" burst from Basil, and for an instant he reeled against Fosdyke's burly form. His worst fears had come true. "The key, woman—the key this instant?" he cried. Then to himself, "Oh, my darling, my darling, pray Heaven it may not be too late!"

"The key," whimpered the woman, who now broke down utterly. "There is only one key, and the Major has it with him in the yawl."

It was as if a blow from an unseen power had smitten the three men. A groan broke from Basil; the others stood in a silence that seemed breathless while it lasted. Fosdyke was the first to break it.

"Then, in Heaven's name!" he exclaimed, "give us something with which we can break in the door of the Tower!"

The words roused Basil; he drew in his breath; his energy came back to him with a rush.

The door-chain had hitherto kept the outsiders at bay. The serving woman now undid it and she and her mistress fell back before Basil and the superintendent.

A couple of minutes sufficed to ransack the house. Nothing could they find that would help their purpose save an old-fashioned kitchen poker and a large hammer. Fosdyke shook his head, but only to brighten up a few moments later. In a shed at the back of the house he came across a stout piece of timber which had evidently been put there to be sawn up for firewood. Calling to Tony and pointing to the log, he and the "natural" hoisted it on their shoulders and started at a run for the Tower, only to find that Basil had reached there before them.

From the moment of Barney's discovery of the fire till their arrival at the Tower but a very few minutes had elapsed. But short as the time had been, it had sufficed to give the fire a still firmer hold. From each of the ground floor windows either quivering tongues of

flame, or dense puffs of smoke were now issuing. During the last quarter of an hour a light wind had begun to blow from the sea which carried the smoke inland. The whole of the windows in the upper stories still stared out blankly; not a gleam of light was visible in any of them. Could it be that Evie had retired for the night, Basil asked himself, and that even the fire had failed to arouse her? Or was it not more likely that she had been overcome by the smoke, which would not fail to ascend and fill the upper floors? Three times he made the circuit of the Tower, calling aloud at intervals with all the strength of his lungs, "Evie—Evie, where are you?" but the silence and darkness remained unbroken. Even if he could have reached to one or other of the upper windows by means of a ladder, of what avail would that have been? No human being bigger than a child of five could have forced its way through the narrow aperture. With a spasm of despair gnawing at his heart he went back to Fosdyke.

The superintendent and Tony were already at work, using the piece of timber as a ram with which to batter down the door. To their forces Basil now joined his; nothing else was left him to do; and, presently the heavy door fell inward with a crash. Basil's first impulse was to rush into the breach, as it were, to make a dash through the smoke and flames for the staircase which led to the next floor; but Fosdyke's firm grip on his collar was just in time to hold him back.

"You shall not go, Mr. Gilmour—you shall not!" he exclaimed. "It would be madness—death. You can see for yourself that the place is a regular furnace; you would never come out of it alive. And as for reaching the staircase, you may depend on it there's not as much of it left by this time as would serve to kindle a kitchen fire with."

Basil sank on his knees and buried his face in his hands. There seemed no help anywhere—none!

But he was mistaken, as we poor mortals so often are, even in the hour of our darkest extremity.

At this moment Barney Groome came limping up at a tremendous rate. He had only half-comprehended the meaning of all that had passed and had lingered behind for the sake of a few elucidatory words from Mrs. Gribble. He now laid a nervous hand on Basil's shoulder.

"Get up, sir, get up; there's not a moment to lose," he cried. He was trembling with excitement. "If I had but known half, ay, a quarter of an hour ago what I know now! But please Heaven, we may yet be in time."

By this time Basil was on his feet, confronting him. His half-maddened eyes asked the question his lips were powerless to frame.

"There's no time now for explanations," said Barney in reply to the mute appeal. "Every moment's precious. Follow me and trust me when I tell you that I know what I'm about."

He spoke with a quick nervous energy which seemed to transform him into another man.

It was astonishing with what celerity he could get over the ground when he was so minded. He now made direct for his own cottage, followed closely by Basil and Fosdyke. By the latter's directions Tony stayed behind at the Tower.

"Light the candles in these," said Barney to Fosdyke, pointing to a couple of lanterns on a shelf in his tiny kitchen. Then he himself disappeared, to return half a minute later, carrying a steel ring on which were strung a number of quaint keys of various shapes and sizes. Giving a lantern to each of the men, Barney, without a word, beckoned them to follow him, and so, after traversing a space of a couple of hundred yards, brought them to the ruins of the little church of St. Ninian and to a flight of moss-grown steps, some six or eight in number, as their lanterns revealed to them, abutting on the outer wall of the chancel. Down the steps went Barney, crutch and all. At the bottom he paused for a moment to select a certain key from his bunch, and having found it, proceeded therewith to open a low heavy-browed, nail-studded door. "If you please, gentlemen," he said to the others with a wave of his hand, who thereupon followed him down the steps.

"We are now in the family vault of the Bolderos. More than a score of 'em sleep their last sleep here under my charge. From this place a secret underground passage leads direct to the Tower, the existence of which is known only to old Miss Boldero and myself. It is said to have originated in the troubled days long ago, when first those who were for one side and then, maybe, a few years later, those who were for the other, had in turn to hide and make themselves scarce. But this is no time for talk. Gentlemen, you are stronger than I. Will you please put down your lanterns and remove this coffin to yonder vacant slab. It is that of Captain Geoffrey Boldero, the last comer here. A good man and true, if ever there was one! Thank you. Now you will find, on trying, that this slab can be lifted out of its sockets. That will do famously."

All this had taken up far less time than the reader might imagine.

The walls of the vault had at one time been whitewashed, but were now dingy with age and damp. To ordinary view there was nothing to distinguish the space, now rendered vacant by the removal of the slab, from any other part of the vault, but Barney soon proved that there *was* a difference, and a very remarkable one. Hidden by the thickness of the slab when in its place, was what by that dim light looked like a patch of mildew, but which was now shown to be a key-hole. Not a moment was lost in fitting it with its proper key, and a few seconds later a heavy iron door, painted to resemble the rest of the vault, yielding to Barney's pressure, swung sullenly back with a dull creaking sound on its rusty hinges, disclosing, as it did so, a narrow opening about six feet in height.

Taking up one of the lanterns, Barney motioned to Gilmour to take the other. "You, sir, will be all right if you follow close on the heels of this gentleman," he said to Fosdyke.

Then, with Barney as leader, they entered the opening in single file. Presently it broadened out a little, but nowhere was there room for two people to walk abreast. It was a work which must have cost both money and pains, and was as perfect to-day as when first completed. Its atmosphere was cool and slightly musty, but not otherwise unpleasant. At first the floor dipped somewhat till it reached a lower level, at which it kept till, finally, the passage was blocked abruptly by a steep flight of stone steps. Not a word had been spoken by any one, but now Barney, half turning, said, "Here we are, at the foot of the Tower. The door at the top of these steps opens on a hidden staircase built in the thickness of the wall."

Without more ado he hobbled up the steps, and with another key, selected from his bunch, opened the door at the head of them, and then by the light of the lanterns, Gilmour and Fosdyke saw before and above them the staircase of which Barney had spoken. It wound spirally round the Tower, and, still following Barney's lead, they began to climb it in the same silence as before.

Presently the third and last door was reached. Again Barney spoke. "This will admit us into the topmost room of the Tower, the one just under the leads. Here, if anywhere, the young lady should be found."

He was unlocking the door as he spoke. When opened, it disclosed to the straining eyes of the others what looked more like an old-fashioned clothes closet lined with dark wood than anything else. But the next moment Barney took two steps forward and pressed heavily with his thumb on a small metal knob. As he did so a large oaken panel fell noiselessly back as if withdrawn by an invisible hand and before them stood revealed the upper room of the Tower.

With a low sharp cry, Basil pushed past Barney and was first in the room. Setting down his lantern on the floor, he gazed around. The place was full of smoke, but not to any suffocating extent. The door which gave admission from the lower room was shut, and only through the narrow opening below it had the smoke been able slowly to penetrate. The furniture comprised a small round table, a couple of ordinary chairs, a cushioned easy-chair, and, in one corner, a couch. On that couch Eveline Sulgrave lay stretched, her cheek resting on the palm of one hand, to all appearance in a deep sleep.

Basil's eyes leapt to her in a moment; the next he was on one knee beside her. How he put his arms round her, how he pressed his lips to hers, all unheeding that he was not alone, and with what endearing terms he sought to rouse her, space is not ours to tell. It is enough to say that after a little while her eyes suddenly opened to their fullest extent. There was an instant's stare of wonder, then into them there stole a look of sweetest recognition.

"You—Basil!" she murmured, while her arm tightened round his neck. "I have been dreaming about you, dear." But even as the words left her lips her head sank backward and with a faint sigh she lapsed into unconsciousness.

"The smoke has been too much for her. We must get her into the fresh air as quickly as possible." So spake Barney.

A quarter of an hour later she was safe under the roof of the farmhouse. But it was not the smoke that had overcome her; there could be little doubt that her coffee had been drugged, and by Sulgrave himself. Later on, the serving-woman admitted having seen him pour something into the cup out of a phial, when he evidently thought himself unobserved.

Long before morning nothing of St. Ninian's Tower was left, save its bare calcined walls.

The yawl came in at daybreak, not with a haul of fish on board, but with a raging madman, bound with ropes to the thwarts of the boat. What Dr. Penrose had for some time foreseen had at length come to pass. The bulwarks of reason, which had long been tottering, had at last given way, and the maniac had leapt forth. Ever since Sulgrave's arrival at the Tower the Gribbles had noticed a certain strangeness both in his speech and manner, for which they were at a loss to account; still, no suspicion of the truth had ever entered their minds. On the Thursday evening the three men had gone out in the yawl as usual, but in the middle of the night, after the net had been cast, and while father and son were quietly smoking, waiting till it was time to haul it in, the elder man had been suddenly attacked by Sulgrave with a sheath knife, which he had hidden somewhere about his person. But for the younger man's alertness, there was no doubt that Gribble would have been stabbed fatally. A blow of the younger man's huge fist felled Sulgrave senseless to the bottom of the boat. When he came to himself, if such a phrase may be applied to him, it was as a raving lunatic. In less than a year he died in an asylum without having ever regained his reason.

The origin of the fire remained a mystery. The Gribbles were utterly unable to account for it. But in everybody's mind there lurked a dark suspicion that, taking into account the state of Sulgrave's mind, and the fact that he had drugged Eveline's coffee, as also that he took the key of the Tower with him in the yawl, he and he alone was responsible for it. But of a man so stricken what could be said? They all felt that it was best to say nothing.

It was by means of a fictitious message from her uncle that Sulgrave had induced Evie to accompany him in the yawl.

What he told her was, that Dr. Penrose, on his way from London to Trewella, had gone round by a certain town about a score of miles off, in order to call upon an old friend whom he had not seen for several years, and that, while out driving, he had been thrown, and had broken his arm. He—the man then addressing her—had been sent by her

uncle to fetch her, in order that she might nurse him. He had been fortunate in finding her without having had to go as far as Trewella. No doubt she would return with him there and then, and he would send one of his men to Elderbank to inform Miss Penrose of all that had happened.

Seeing the girl's hesitation, he produced a scrap of paper on which were scrawled a few words, purporting to have been written with the doctor's left hand. "Dear Eveline, I have met with a bad accident. Come to me at once.—Your uncle."

Then Evie hesitated no longer. Not till it was too late did she pause to ask herself how it happened that the smooth-spoken gentleman with the gold-laced cap seemed to know so well who she was, while to her he was an utter stranger. Of what befell her afterwards it is enough to say that beyond being confined to the two rooms in the Tower, she had nothing much to complain of. The serving-woman took her her meals, and waited on her after her rough country fashion, but was wholly impervious to each and every question on Evie's part.

Of the means adopted by Sulgrave to discover the place where Penrose had bestowed Eveline, no information was ever forthcoming. The probability is that he set private detectives to watch the doctor's comings and goings, and as the latter at that time was frequently at Hampstead, besides taking Eveline more than once with him to the lawyer's, there would be little difficulty in tracing the girl to her temporary abode in the London suburb, and thence to Trewella, when the time came for her and Miss Penrose to go back home.

And now but little more remains to be told.

There was no one to oppose the coming of Miss Sulgrave into the property which had *de facto* been hers all along, and equally there was no one to oppose her marrying the man of her choice, whom Dr. Penrose had no longer any occasion to stigmatise as a fortune-hunter.

To Eveline the doctor and Miss Penrose will remain her uncle and aunt to the end of their days.

As the doctor had predicted, the marriage of Guy Sulgrave with the Lady Mary Langmere never came to pass. Guy, who had never been *entitled* with the young lady, took the matter very philosophically. A little later he went out to one of the Western States of America, where he became the owner of a large cattle ranch, the purchase money for which was found him by his cousin Eveline.

Although Gilmour had married a rich wife, he was too much in love with his profession to give it up; in point of fact, he continued to work as hard at it as ever he had done. He took Tony Scarbin into his studio, where he made himself useful in a score of different ways. Tony used to sketch to the life nearly everybody who called on his master, but there his artistic faculty began and ended. We may be sure that Barney Groome was not forgotten by either Gilmour or his wife.

THE JOURNEY'S END.

WHICH would you choose—if you could choose
The way to enter your final rest?
What is the pathway you would use—
Which is the door would please you best?

Would you go out of life with a rush,
Knowing nothing of how or when,
With a gleam of the sun, and the song of the thrush,
The last thing caught from the world of men?

Would you lie down on a bed of pain,
And fight for a scanty measure of breath,
'Till the merciful languor lulled heart and brain,
And the stupor of life was merged in death?

Would you die to the sound of a nation's cheers,
With the swift sharp pang of an enemy's ball;
Or wear out the length of the weary years,
Till life holds nothing, and death holds all?

Would you pass in sleep as a little child,
That breathes out its soul on its mother's knee?
But the children are holy and undefiled,
And sorrowful world-worn men are we.

Would you meet with the angel face to face,
And scan the journey that lies before,
As a traveller taketh heart of grace
When he steers his bark for an unknown shore?

What does it matter! at set of sun,
In the sweet spring dawn or when midnight fall,
So long as the work of the day be done,
And the worker ready to hear the call?

Painless or pained, or swift or slow,
Early or late, whate'er betide,
I shall not trouble which way I go,
If the Shepherd of men walks by my side.

Yea, when that voice sounds loud and sweet
I shall stretch out my hands and cry to Him,
That the love which has guarded my toiling feet,
May hold me fast in the valley dim.

How can I choose which way is best?
Endeth alike both calm and strife;
For all roads lead to the City of Rest,
And beyond the River of Death lies Life.

CHRISTIAN BURKE.

